



Abdel-Hadi Radi,
portrait of the
week by
George
Bahgory



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Algerian poll

ALGERIANS go to the polls today to vote on major constitutional reforms that will redraw the country's political map. The controversial referendum is being held in the face of strong opposition from Algeria's major political parties, many of which have called for a boycott. It passed the reforms would ban Islamic and Berber parties and boost presidential powers.

At a press conference in Brussels, Hussein Ayat Ahmed, secretary-general of the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), described the referendum as a means to "enhance tyrannical rule." The referendum campaign has been marred by a series of bomb attacks and massacres which have left at least 148 people dead.

Israel rebuked

THE US delivered its sharpest rebuke yet on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's expansionist settlement policy when State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns, in an unsolicited statement to reporters in Washington, said that Netanyahu's high-profile visit to Ariel on Tuesday, and his call for an expansion of the settlements, was neither useful nor constructive, and only complicated the peace process.

Last June Netanyahu's right-wing government lifted the freeze on settlements imposed by its predecessor, before approving plans for building thousands of homes on the West Bank.

Deal exposed

SYRIAN FOREIGN Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa revealed details of the blue print for a peace agreement with Israel, concluded in negotiations last February, for the first time since the agreement was recorded in thousands of pages of minutes, messages, and signed letters, refuting claims by Israel that the understandings had only ever been verbal.

At a press conference in London, Sharaa said it had been agreed that Israel would withdraw from the Syrian Golan Heights and disengage settlements, and that Syria and Israel would conduct substantive talks on security arrangements and negotiate diplomatic relations. The decision to keep the agreement quiet was, he said, largely at the behest of former Labour Prime Minister Simon Pates, who feared an outcry at home should details leak out before the agreement could be finalised. Sharaa insisted the US should pressure Israel to accept the commitments reached in the last five years before restarting talks on the Syrian-Israeli track.

Mild tremor

YESTERDAY, an earthquake, measuring 5 degrees on the Richter scale, shook Cairo and the Nile Delta at 2.45 am, but caused no casualties or damage, said Rashad Qubeisi of the National Institute for Astronomical and Geophysical Research. The tremor was an aftershock of the earthquake that jolted the Middle East on 9 October. The epicentres of the quake and the aftershock were in the Mediterranean, south west of Cyprus, Qubeisi said.

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Housing enlightenment

THE TWO-STORY house in which Taha Hussein (1889-1973), one of the most celebrated figures of Egypt's twentieth century cultural and intellectual life, lived for almost 20 years is to be opened as a museum, reports Randa Khalaf. The house whose name, Ramatan, meaning two oases, is inscribed on the gateposts, is located on Hilmeyet Al-Ahram Street in the Pyramids district.

Following Taha Hussein's death in 1973 the house continued to be occupied by his widow, Suzanne, until her own death in 1989. Three years later Hussein's heirs sold the house, together with its contents, to the Ministry of Culture for LE1.1 million, with the intention that it should be converted into a museum. That conversion is now complete and at last Ramatan is to open its doors to the public.

Great efforts have been made to maintain the atmosphere of the house exactly as it was when Taha Hussein lived there. The walls are hung with works by Egyptian and European painters, including a magnificent portrait of Suzanne (pictured right, behind a bust of Taha Hussein), the shelves are stacked with the books and records collected throughout a lifetime which spanned the most momentous events in Egypt's modern history.

In many ways the house serves as an index of the cultural and political life of the present century. Taha Hussein lived through the 1919 Revolution, through two world wars and the revolution of 1952. His most controversial work, a study of pre-Islamic poetry, first published in 1926, resulted in his condemnation by religious authorities. He occupied senior posts in university administration — serving as dean of the Faculty of Arts at King Fouad University in Cairo, and later as rector of King Farouk University, an administrative career that culminated in his appointment as minister of education in 1950 and the reforms that established the principles of free education in Egypt.

"Very few changes have been introduced so that the house may remain an embodiment of the spirit of the great writer," said Mustafa El-Sharkawi, the museum's director. The ground floor houses Hussein's office and 7,000-book library, while a smaller building in the garden has been converted into a cultural centre which, according to its director, Mohamed Nassef, will be used for discussions of the continuing legacy of Hussein's pioneering works.



Photo: Sherif Gouda

Veto spoils one-horse race

Although time is running out, deadlock continues at the United Nations over the re-election of Boutros Ghali. Hoda Tawfik reports from New York

The US does not seem to have softened its opposition to the re-election of Boutros Ghali for a second term as UN Secretary-General. But neither does the African group of states, who insist that Ghali is their sole candidate, appear ready to budge.

The 15-member Security Council was deadlocked after a vote on Monday night in which the only name presented was that of 74-year-old Ghali. The US had used its veto a week earlier to block Ghali's re-election despite the fact that he commanded the support of the Council's 14 other members.

"We don't have any [new] list. It is composed of one person, Dr Boutros Ghali," said Botswana's UN Ambassador Legwaila Joseph Legwaila. Botswana is a Council member.

Egypt's Ambassador Nabil El-Arabi also said that Ghali is Africa's sole candidate. Asked when another vote would be taken, he said "when there are 15".

The Arab League's representative at the United Nations, Mahmoud Abul-Nasr, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "The irony is that Ghali was elected secretary-general by 11 votes five years ago. Now he has the support of 14 but is losing."

Abul-Nasr said the present mood among UN member-

states is to "reject the heavy-handed policy of the US. The ball is in America's court as Ghali remains the sole African candidate," Abul-Nasr added.

Diplomats at the UN believe Washington is not yet ready for the compromise — a two-year extension of Ghali's term — suggested earlier. Ghali, whose term expires on 31 December, insists he still wants a solution to be found, admitting, however, that "without the cooperation of the United States, I will not be able to fulfil the objectives of the United Nations. My problem, if I have a problem, is to convince the US that I can serve the United Nations and serve the interests of the United States as a member of the United Nations," he said in a radio interview.

Ghali said that he can only function with the support of UN member-states. "So, if I don't have the support of the most important actor, which is the United States, then I have to leave by the end of the year," he said.

Time is running out because the General Assembly, which must approve any candidate, will go into recess on 17 December. And there is no guarantee that a last-minute candidate will meet America's new criteria — the ability to introduce reforms to the UN.

An editorial in the *Washington Post* warned against the

choice of a second-rate secretary-general. It said "the names so far forwarded do not meet the American desire for a great manager or the general desire for a world-class political figure... The United Nations has been weakened; to replace Mr Boutros Ghali with a second-rate manager would flatten the organisation."

The Clinton administration, facing mounting criticism for opposing Ghali, appeared determined to stick to its guns. Anthony Lake, White House national security adviser, said the US wanted Ghali replaced in order to convince Congress to pay more than \$1 billion in arrears owed.

"I think he's done many good things and personally I know the president likes him," Lake told NBC News. "The problem is that the UN is in desperate need of reform and we need a secretary-general who can carry out those reforms in a way that Boutros Ghali has not."

But Senator George McGovern, president of the Middle East Policy Council, told the *Weekly*: "I hate to see the US going against the world. I don't understand the opposition to Boutros Ghali. I think he has done a reasonably good job and I disagree with American efforts to replace him."

Ted Turner, president of Turner Broadcasting, said at a

conference at the UN that America should yield to the majority of the world. "Who is the United States to stand alone against the re-election of this good man when the rest of the world... At this point Turner was interrupted by shouts of "bravo, bravo." He continued: "I just ask the United States government to reverse its position and go along... We believe in democracy. That means the majority rules, and the majority voted 14-1. Even Britain, who listens to what America wants, said yes."

James Zogby, president of the Arab-American Institute, put American intransigence down to political factors, none of which, he claimed, justified the US risking its position at the UN or the future of the world body. "I don't see any fundamental thing they have done," he said.

France, Russia and China, who also have veto power, continue to back Ghali.

Some African nations have candidates they want to promote for the job. But they are holding back on making a formal proposal until they are convinced there is no hope of negotiating at least a two-year extension for Ghali, Reuters said, though Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, in a letter to Cameroon President Paul Biya, chairman of the Organisation of African Unity, has urged that alternative candidates be presented.

Mummies in cyberspace

Ever seen a digital pharaoh, or listened to the voice of Umm Kaltoum coming from your computer? Internet users can now access sites on the Worldwide Web (WWW), re-suscitating Egypt's past and shedding new light on the present, writes Omayma Abdel-Latif

Egyptomania, the craze for all things Egyptian that took Europe by storm following Napoleon's expedition, has resurfaced. Some two centuries later in the most unlikely of places, on the Internet. Over 40 million users in more than 230 countries can now access 30 Web sites providing information on topics ranging from Egyptian art and music to specialist travel agencies, from Ancient Egyptian cuisine to the latest archaeological discoveries. Some are run by the Egyptology departments of famous museums and universities, others by individuals.

"Egypt still makes a great subject for study; it is as great a mystery today as it was at the end of the last century," commented a British Egyptologist who runs one of the sites.

Some sites are providing Net users with a selection of on-line "tour" programmes. One site, The Egyptian Experience, is entirely devoted to such tours. Nina Williams, the programme manager, provides her readers with a "top 10" list of reasons to explore Egypt, including "a very safe environment for single tourists, whether male or female," the "opportunity to meet and mingle with the wonders of the Nile Valley and its people," and "the adventure, romance, and mystery of famous Egyptian monuments."

"There has been remarkable response since we went on-line," Williams told *Al-Ahram Weekly* via E-mail. "People want to know everything about the country. They write to us saying they have no time to read books of travel guides."

The Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) has also joined the WWW bandwagon and allocated a Web site to answer inquiries about Egypt.

"The Internet is demand-led and hence must reflect what people are interested in," said the head of the ETA office in New York, adding that the ETA site has been "showered with questions" since it opened for business.

The "Egyptian" government has also realised the potential of the Internet

and last January, after cabinet prompting, the Tourism Net was launched, joining the handful of locally run sites. It provides directories of Egyptian hotels, restaurants, cruise liners, and travel agents.

Egypt Has It All and Colour Tour of Egypt are two sites run from Cairo. The former focuses on the diversity of Egypt's attractions, encompassing history and culture, desert travel and Red Sea diving while the latter features historical sites including Abu Simbel, Abydos, and Dendera, with information and clickable maps. A third local site features restaurants, hotels, cruises and tour destinations. According to its home page this site has been accessed by 25,559 users since January 1996.

Many Egyptologists believe that the interest in Ancient Egypt among Internet users reflects a wave of Egyptomania that has been steadily growing for almost a decade.

Richard Fazzini, chairman of the Egyptian Classical and Ancient Middle Eastern Art Department at Brooklyn Museum, views the explosion of interest in Egypt on the Internet as proof of the continued fascination exerted on the West by the images and symbols of its ancient civilisation and concludes that, with a home packed with 400 Egyptian-themed knick-knacks, he is himself something of an Egyptomaniac.

International museums such as the Louvre have allocated a home page to their Egyptology departments, listing their collections of Egyptian artefacts with graphics, date of discovery, and the dynasty to which the items belong.

The Cairo Café site, run by the Uni-

versity of Chicago, includes news on foreign archaeological missions in Egypt and a search tool for archaeological queries. There are also sites featuring Islamic architecture, run by the Australian National University, and the Oriental Institute Museum's Egyptian collection, run by the University of Chicago.

The *Guardian's* Egypt site, awarded "four stones" by the WWN Post-Mortem Page for its excellence of content, as well as the Web of Culture Choice Award, features news on archaeological discoveries, museums and exhibitions, together with rare images of Ancient Egypt, plus information on Egyptian art and music along with book reviews and Egyptian recipes. The site has been accessed by 33,924 visitors since January 1996, and among the most popular items is a DIY guide to mummification.

Sites like the *Guardian's* use the new medium to provide access to vast quantities of information. But can the Net be relied on for accuracy? The unregulated nature of the Internet means that any individual can open a site on the subject of his or her choice which, according to experts, leads to confusion and the propagation of historical inaccuracies.

"Anybody can put whatever information they want on the Net without having to verify it," said one Egyptologist, who discovered a number of inaccuracies while browsing through several Net sites.

Jill Kamil, author of several books on Pharaonic Egypt and the early Christian period, shares this view. "Of course," she pointed out, "when the Internet relies on poor or outdated source material it propagates the inaccurate information that the new technology should be updating."

The perpetuation of old inaccuracies may well be a by-product of using the Net to tell the world about Egypt. It is, though, something with which the experts will have to learn to live. Egyptomania has arrived, and shows no sign of abating.

Festival stakes

At the 20th Cairo International Film Festival, which opens on 2 December, the stakes are higher than ever. To mark UNESCO's choice of Cairo as cultural capital of the Arab world, Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni has earmarked LE100,000 to be awarded to the best Arab film in the festival. So far, there are nine films in competition, of which three are Egyptian entrants, two from Algeria, the rest from Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine and Lebanon.



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A report on the state of religion in Egypt, prepared by the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, is described as an unprecedented attempt to provide documented and comprehensive information on a critical issue. **Amira Howeidj** reviews the report's content and **Khaled Dawoud** interviews its editors

Religion today

What is the relationship between religion and politics? What are the roles played by Egypt's religious institutions? How independent are they from the executive and to what extent are they involved in politics? The Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies report makes a bold attempt to provide answers to these thorny questions.

The report deals with the state of religion in four chapters: official religious institutions such as Al-Azhar, the Mufti's office, the Ministry of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments), the Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches; non-official organisations such as the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and radical Islamic groups; civic and charity work carried out by Muslim and Christian NGOs; with the fourth and last chapter monitoring the interactions between these groups and public-political life. A politically significant small part of the report is devoted to explaining the terminology most commonly used in religiously-oriented researches and studies.

In addition to providing information on the sheikhs of Al-Azhar, the popes of the Coptic Church, the laws governing these institutions and their activities and roles, the report focuses on the relationship between religion and politics. According to the report, the Al-Azhar Mosque has always been a channel for propagating the views of the ruling regime, from its inception at the hands of the Fatimids who sought to impose the Shi'ite faith on Egypt. However, throughout its 1,000-year-old history, Al-Azhar did enjoy certain periods of independence. But this independence was completely taken away by the 1952 and 1953 revolution. The late President Gamal Abdel Nasser passed a law in 1961 which gave the President of the Republic the right to appoint the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. The mosque was also deprived of its financial independence because most of its *waqf* (endowments) were nationalised "to serve the socialist cause." The report cites several examples of state domination of Al-Azhar but points out that the mosque regained some of its independence under President Hosni Mubarak.

The report monitors an "exceptionally active" Al-Azhar in 1995, repeatedly clashing with *Dar El-Ifta'* (the Mufti's office), the second Islamic religious authority. Controversial issues focused attention on the original roles of the two institutions and raised crucial questions such as "who should issue the religious *fatwas* (rulings)?" Despite these clashes, the two institutions were in agreement on political questions, particularly those related to official government policy.

For its part, the Coptic Orthodox Church, which has its own regulatory laws, enjoys full independence in decision-making and the choice of its leader. However, this independence, points the report, does not extend beyond the church's walls.

Elections for the Milli (Coptic community)

Council and the People's Assembly "revealed the desire of the secular Coptic sectors to play a role in public life at a time when they are faced with a dead end in national and partisan channels," the report said. The parliamentary elections, however, caused wide-scale frustration in Coptic circles who were shocked by the fact that not a single Coptic candidate managed to make it to parliament by means of election, the report added.

Moreover, electioneering included the use of religious slogans "that negatively touched upon the issue of national unity" as some candidates urged voters not to elect Copts. Even more important, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) did not nominate a single Coptic candidate in the elections, the report said.

As for the Milli Council, it has limited authority and is easily dominated by Pope Shenouda III, the report added.

Although the Coptic Orthodox Church wields religious and social strength inside Egypt and among Coptic expatriates, it has no political role. Nevertheless, the report refers to the major efforts exerted by the "charismatic" Pope Shenouda, whose era is marked by unprecedented openness toward the outside world.

According to the report, Muslims and Christians continue to have a stereotypical view of each other. Muslim and Christian institutions are more or less dominated by traditional and conservative views enforced by their leaders. And, in analysing the speeches made by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, the Mufti and the Coptic Pope, the report finds large areas of agreement on the majority of topical political and social issues.

Despite the publicised differences between the *fatwas* of the late Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq, and the former Mufti, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, who now heads Al-Azhar, both men agreed on the essence of several issues such as arts, family planning, *Jihad* (struggle) in Palestine and organ transplants. There was also a consensus between the Islamic and Christian institutions on the Jerusalem issue, normalisation with Israel, violence and terrorism and the ways of dealing with them, the report said.

The report pointed out the significant number of Islamic NGOs which make up 34 percent of the total number of Egyptian NGOs, with the Coptic NGOs amounting to nine percent. In the meantime, there was a decline in the number of cultural organisations, "which indicates a serious imbalance and the religious dominance over the other roles of such organisations."

According to the report, the most significant religious-political phenomenon of the year was the clampdown on the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. It reflected the government's determination to stop the group's expansion within the middle class sectors through its domination of the major professional syndicates, the report said.

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Creating a full picture

Religious sentiment has been on the rise in Egypt, among all sectors of society, both Muslim or Christian. This is one of the basic premises behind the comprehensive 400-page report produced by the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

The roles of religious institutions such as Al-Azhar, the Mufti's office, the Coptic Church, political Islamic groups — both moderate and radical — Sufis, and Muslim and Christian charity organisations have also gained greater public prominence. "So there was a need for a careful and objective study to cover the issue, providing detailed and updated information on those institutions and the roles they perform in public life," explained Abdel-Moneim Said, director of the Al-Ahram Centre.

What distinguishes the centre's report, according to Said, is that it was prepared by Egyptians, both Muslims and Christians, who not only had the advantage of being part of the culture, but whose experience in the field enabled them to make use of scientific research methods.

In order to avoid charges of political bias, particularly towards the government, in the section dealing with the armed Islamic groups, Said told the *Al-Ahram Weekly* that at least two sessions were held to review the section. One of these included 12 experts on Islamic-related issues from outside the Al-Ahram Centre, who commented on the report and the information it included. "Most of their recommendations were taken into consideration and nearly all parties showed maximum cooperation when we asked them for information," he said.

Dr. A. Rashwan, the report's managing editor, said it had three major objectives: to allow Egyptians to learn more about each other, to initiate a

non-biased study which would not support the view of any one group against another and to create a comprehensive database on religious institutions and groups in Egypt, instead of having information scattered in hundreds of studies.

"We have to admit that many Egyptians do not know enough about Al-Azhar, the Ministry of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments) and the Coptic Church, despite their extremely important roles," Rashwan said. He added that, in the midst of a religious revival that has included both Muslims and Christians, the report was particularly concerned with studying the status of Christians in Egypt — Orthodox Copts, Catholics and Protestants. "It is also a chance to revive the principles of national unity among all the people of the nation," he said. "Knowing more about each other, Muslims and Christians should be able to avoid holding misconceptions and making generalisations about the other camp."

The team of 14 researchers and 12 assistants, led by Nabil Abdel-Fattah, the report's editor, and Rashwan, have also sought to reach a kind of consensus on the terms used in the report. The term used for armed Islamic groups, for example, caused wide controversy.

"Of course, we didn't use terms like 'terrorist' or 'extremist' to ensure that we wouldn't be accused of supporting the government view," Rashwan said. "But, we also felt that terms used in Western writing, like 'fundamentalist', were not accurate, so we agreed to use the word 'radical' because they are seeking a deeply-rooted change in the society," he added. The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest and oldest political Islamic group, was given a chapter of its own to underline its significance.

Spy arrested

SECURITY authorities have arrested a 47-year-old man on suspicion of selling military information to Mossad, the Israeli secret service. The man, Samir Osman, is said to have met Mossad agents in Greece, Turkey and Hungary or by swimming underwater to Elat in Israel with scuba diving equipment from the Red Sea border resort of Taba.

Osman was said to have confessed to providing Mossad with information about the Egyptian Navy and about the place where he had once served in the Egyptian military.

A search of Osman's flat revealed four passports and other incriminating documents. Under questioning, he confessed to meeting Mossad agents on many occasions and sending his information to a post office box in Greece. He also frequented the Israeli Embassy and the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo and visited Israel openly on the pretext of seeking work.

The prosecutor general has filed several charges against him, including selling information to a foreign state with the aim of damaging Egypt's political and military position.

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Court ruling met with scepticism

The Supreme Administrative Court ruled last week that the People's Assembly is the only body empowered by the Constitution to decide whether the parliamentary membership of a deputy is valid or not.

The court said that administrative courts are authorised to hear civil cases involving the government only, and have no jurisdiction to decide on disputes over the conduct of elections in a certain constituency.

The court cited Article 93 of the Constitution as the basis for its ruling. This article states that anyone who wishes to contest the validity of a deputy's membership should submit an appeal to the speaker of the People's Assembly, who will refer it in turn to the Court of Cassation for investigation. The result of the investigation is sent to the Assembly, which has the final word on the case. The clear implication was that the Court of Cassation's findings are in the nature of a recommendation that is not binding on the Assembly.

Many legal experts were disappointed by the decision of the Supreme Administrative Court, warning that it could have serious consequences. As a way out of the impasse, some of these experts recommended amending Article 93 to make the Court of Cassation's findings binding on the People's Assembly.

Dozens of candidates who lost in the last parliamentary elections of November-December 1995 have filed appeals with administrative courts, charging that ir-

regularities had marred the ballot and vote-counting. The courts ruled that the elections in 105 constituencies were invalid and that the parliamentary membership of 210 deputies was null and void. But the Interior Ministry, which organised the elections, appealed against the rulings to the Supreme Administrative Court.

Lawyer Kamal Khalid, a former independent member of parliament, believes that Article 93 of the Constitution should be modified because it empowers the People's Assembly "to act as the arbiter and the adversary" at the same time. "When legislators included this article in the Constitution, they never imagined that there could be such a large number of deputies winning by fraud," Khalid said. Moreover, the People's Assembly was not qualified to decide on the validity of the membership of its deputies, argued Khalid, "because workers and peasants make up 50 per cent of the Assembly's members and, of course, they are not capable of playing judges."

Hilmi Murad, deputy chairman of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, said that the case should not have been decided on the basis of Article 93. He argued that the appeals filed with administrative courts did not target the validity of deputies' membership but the administrative measures taken by the Interior Ministry in organising the elections. "Thus, Article 93 is not applicable. The appeals should be heard by administrative courts because they deal

with administrative measures, in line with Article 172 of the Constitution." Pessimistic about the possible consequences of the court's decision, Murad warned: "Some people, frustrated by their inability to obtain justice, may resort to violence as the only way out."

Atif El-Banna, a professor of constitutional law at Cairo University, argued that the court's decision negated the fundamentals of justice by allowing the Assembly to act as both arbiter and adversary. Moreover, he continued, the ruling focused attention on one article of the Constitution and neglected others. As an example, he cited Article 68 which states that citizens have the right to appeal to their "natural judges." The Assembly, he pointed out, was certainly not part of the judiciary.

El-Banna also said the court's decision did not mean that the elections had been conducted properly, because the ruling dealt with the form of the appeals without touching on their substance.

Sources at the Court of Cassation told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the court had already considered around 350 election appeals and sent its findings to the Assembly. The court has ruled that the membership of nearly 200 deputies is invalid, and still has about 600 appeals to investigate. The Assembly, citing the principle of the separation of powers, rarely abides by the court's findings.

Cairo governor under fire

At a stormy meeting of parliament's housing committee, MPs demanded the dismissal of Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher for his failure to curb construction offences. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

The tragic collapse of an apartment building in Heliopolis last month, with the loss of 67 lives, has triggered calls for the dismissal of Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher from MPs at a meeting of the housing committee of the People's Assembly. The stormy meeting was attended by Mahmoud Shafik, minister of local administration, Ibrahim Suleiman, minister of housing and new communities, Abdel-Rehim Sobeh, governor of Giza, and a large number of deputies. Abdel-Akher, castigated by MPs for failing to curb construction offences, was notably absent.

Deputies, both from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and the opposition, also criticised a "military order" issued by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri following the Heliopolis collapse, which provides harsher penalties for building offences. The ministers of housing and local administration declined immediate comment on the MPs' critical remarks, saying they would wait until a later meeting.

The committee's chairman, Mohamed Mahmoud Ali Hassan, who led a field visit to the site of the collapsed building, said the government's lax application of existing laws, and not the lack of legislation, was the reason behind the large number of construction offences.

When Hassan gave the floor to deputies at the Sunday meeting, they lashed out at local administration officials, holding them responsible for the collapse of buildings. Abdel-Akher repeatedly came under fire, with two MPs calling for his dismissal. But other deputies, particularly those from Giza, rallied to Abdel-Akher's defence, arguing that the meeting "should not be turned into a verbal attack against the governor."

Hamdi El-Tahan, an NDP deputy for Kom Hamada in Beheira Governorate, was the first to take Abdel-Akher to task. "I don't know why the governor did not come to this meeting... to answer our questions and confirm whether the number of building offences has reached [a reported] 700,000," El-Tahan said. "It is clear that the Cairo governor did not perform well on this national issue. He is not able to take action to curb construction offences in Cairo and this is why I think he should be dismissed from his post. If the state does not hold him responsible, it will be a stain on the face of our government."

El-Badri Farghali, a leftist deputy from Port Said, said that although Egypt had faced many tragic events in the last few years, including the collapse of buildings, torrential rains, earthquakes and train crashes, no action was ever taken to question ministers and governors who failed to deal with the effects of such events on ordinary citizens. "In another country, the collapse of a building like the one that recently came down in Heliopolis, could result in the fall of an entire government," said Farghali. "But here the governor, who is the real criminal, seems to be immune from dismissal. I don't know if he is above the law. I strongly call upon the committee's chairman to file political charges against the Cairo governor in an attempt to have him dismissed from his post because he is clearly responsible for most building offences."

Another deputy from Port Said, the NDP's Mahmoud Sobh, said that on his field visit to the Heliopolis site, the committee had been greatly upset by the construction offences. "During this visit, we drew the attention of the governor's deputy to 40 apartment buildings in Heliopolis and Nasr City which are on the verge of collapse. We were given assurances that urgent action would be taken to deal with the situation... but no measures have been taken at all," Sobh reported. He called for the establishment of a parliamentary fact-finding committee to investigate the corruption "which is rife among local administration officials and which is mainly responsible for building offences and collapses."

Mustafa El-Qayati, an NDP deputy for Atfih in the Governorate of Giza, gave an example of "how the governor of Cairo implements the law." "In 1993," he said, "I went to the governor of Cairo to tell him about a building in Manial Al-Roda [a Nile Island between Cairo and Giza] which violated building laws. The governor welcomed me and gave instructions to his deputy that three unlicensed floors on top of the building should be removed. I went to the chairman of the Old Cairo district [of which Manial Al-Roda is part] who told me 'sorry, we have instructions from above that the owner of this building is exempt [from regulations]'. I went back to the governor who gave further instructions that the unlicensed floors be removed within a week. Now we are in 1996 and no measures have been taken at all. In fact, the owner has added extra floors."

Other deputies rose to the governor's defence. Infuriated by El-Qayati's story, Ahmed Shihha, a businessman deputy from Cairo's Al-Darb Al-Ahmar district, urged the committee's chairman not to allow the meeting to turn into a verbal tirade against the governor "because we are discussing a public issue and not personal charges." But many deputies threatened to walk out unless they were allowed to "point an accusing finger at the real criminals." The deputies said they did not want to "lose credibility with ordinary citizens."

Soraya Labra, an NDP deputy for Nasr City, where building offences abound, commented: "The problem does not lie with the governor of Cairo but with the law. The governor took all possible and impossible measures to curb building offences, but we should admit that matters are out of his hands. The problem has its origin in Law 30 of 1983, which allowed offenders to keep their extra storeys, and remain in good standing with the district council, if they paid a fine equal to the value of the unauthorised floors. This opened the door for most building offences in Nasr City, and the government's new market-oriented and privatisation policies in the housing sector forced state-owned housing companies, especially the Nasr City Construction and Development Company, to develop their own code of construction at the expense of compliance with the law."

Labra also objected to El-Ganzouri's military order. "I think it escaped everybody's mind that there is another military order issued in 1992 [following the collapse of another Heliopolis building] that contains harsher penalties," she said. Ibrahim Amasha, an NDP deputy from Al-Manzala in the Daqahliya Governorate, argued that the military order was issued simply for its psychological and deterrent effect.

Fathi Salama, an NDP deputy for the Cairo district of Khalifa, said the governor of Cairo should attend the committee's meetings to answer the deputies' questions. "For our part, the task ahead is to unify all building laws into one law," he added.

Speaking on behalf of Abdel-Akher, deputy governor Ibrahim Kamel denied that he had ever said there were as many as 700,000 buildings violating construction law in Cairo. Rounding up the debate, committee chairman Mohamed Mahmoud Ali Hassan said that construction offences "will be the only item on our agenda in this parliamentary session. We will not let it go until a final solution is reached. These offences have reached dangerous proportions and our duty as MPs is to help people regain confidence in local officials and to ensure they have a secure place to live and sleep in."

Why the building collapsed

A COMMITTEE of experts investigating the collapse of the Heliopolis building has blamed the disaster on the addition of unauthorised floors on top of the building as well as the destruction of a pillar or walls on the ground floor. The committee, made up of construction engineering professors, said in a report that the main reason for the collapse was that the pillars supporting the building were overloaded — an allusion to the five unauthorised storeys which the landlord added to the building in 1976.

Another reason, the committee said, was that one of the supporting pillars was weakened or broken as a result of plumbing or electric work and/or the demolition of nearby walls.

Committee member Abdallah Abu-Zeid said that without the addition of the unauthorised floors, the breaking of the pillar by itself would not have caused the building to collapse.

مكتبة من الأصل

The villagers of Al-Ma'na in Qena probably suffered the most as a result of the torrential rains. Dina Ezzat tells the story, while Randa Shaath's camera captures the aftermath of the disastrous deluge

Ordeal by water

Mounds of mud, rows of tents and large groups of people awaiting the arrival of relief supplies — this is what the village of Al-Ma'na, on the northeastern edge of Qena governorate, now looks like following the torrential rains of 16-18 November. Gone is the old village, with small mudbrick houses dotting the sides of unpaved roads, extensive fields tended by peasant men and women, and palm trees with children playing in their shadows.

About 10 days have passed since torrential rains devastated the village, dispossessing residents of their belongings — with the exception of the clothes they wore — and forcing them to spend a fearful night and the major part of the following day on the mountains with no roof over their heads and no food.

"When we realised that the rainwater was coming through the spillway, we gathered along its banks to keep a close watch on the situation — the water level in the spillway," said Ragab Atallah, a 40-year-old employee of the Qena Transport Department.

To the villagers, the situation did not look particularly good. But, according to Atallah, it "deteriorated much faster than we thought it would. By 4pm on 17 November, the water was pushing forcefully with a terrifying sound. The water level kept rising until it burst the banks of the spillway, flooded the road and headed toward the village."

Hundreds of residents acted to stop the advance of the water but to no avail. "We spent hours trying to reinforce the banks; we did everything we could, but we failed. The water defeated us," said El-Sayed Mohamed, a 48-year-old villager.

By nightfall, flooding seemed imminent. "Because the electricity cables run near the end of the spillway, we had to cut off the power supply to avoid a major disaster. As a result, the night became even darker and we could not see what we were doing," Mohamed added.

Then it was time for thousands of men and children to start running towards the nearby mountain, a distance of about one kilometre, to take refuge there. "It was so dark. I could hear the voices of my parents, sisters and brothers near me but I couldn't see them well," recalled Inan Kamal, a 12-year-old schoolgirl.

"Nobody had time to look around them; people were just running and assuming that their family members were running with them," said Mohamed Abdel-Fattah, a 50-year-old farmer. On reaching the mountain, some of them realised that this was not the case. Abdel-Fattah had to run back to look for two missing daughters.

"I went back to find the house completely flooded," he said. "I heard the voice of one girl calling for her sister. I carried her on my shoulder and looked for the other one. It took me a few minutes to find her, put her on the other shoulder and head back towards the mountain."

Mohamed Ragab, a 19-year-old university student, also had to go back to search for his mother and sister. When he arrived at what used to be his house, he found the mother buried up to her chest in mud. His sister was also drowning and fighting to keep her head above the mud.

"My mother was nearest, so I reached out for her first," he said. "When I managed to get her, I heard my sister imploring us to go and leave her to the alone. She feared that we might all drown if we stayed to get her." But Ragab managed to rescue the sister as well and all three took shelter on the mountain.

Only one old man died under the water. "He lived alone and had no family. Two neighbours went to get him but by the time they arrived, it was too late," Ragab said.

Once on the slopes of the mountain, the villagers felt safe from the rising waters, but there was another threat to worry about — snakes and scorpions. "They were driven out of their holes by the water. We were terrified, but had no alternative but to stay," said Gamalat Ali, a 58-year-old peasant woman.

It took nearly 20 hours for the rain to stop so the villagers could come down from the mountain.

"It was real horror, we lived through the blackest hours of our lives; we had a close encounter with death and somehow survived," said Hussein Nassar, an 18-year-old university student as he scraped at the muddy remains of a two-floor mudbrick house which he once inhabited along with his parents and six brothers and sisters. Like most of the 15,000 villagers of El-Ma'na, Nassar had no time to take any of his belongings when he dashed to the mountain. "There was no time, not a minute; we just had to escape," he explained, continuing to dig at the mud with his bare hands. "My bedroom used to be here. I know the books should be here. I paid LE120 for them," he said.

A look of satisfaction came over his face, and he broke into a broad smile as he recovered an Arabic-English dictionary from the mud. "My father paid LE90 for this dictionary. It is the most expensive of all my books, even more expensive than all my shirts and trousers," he said. Nassar then waved the dictionary at his father and mother, who were also searching the mud for lost belongings.

But only a lucky few managed to retrieve anything. Dozens of stories are being told about young women who lost their trousseaus in the muddy debris of their homes, others who lost gold jewellery and meagre savings, civil servants who lost what remained of their salaries.

"We are very much aware of the dimensions of the tragedy that befell Al-Ma'na and seven other villages that were flooded," commented Sawfar Shaker, the governor



Residents of Al-Ma'na suffer the consequences of torrential rains, with mounds of mud and collapsed houses all that remain of their village. Rows of tents provide shelter, and large groups of people await the arrival of relief supplies, while others search through the wreckage for lost belongings

of Qena. According to Shaker, his department launched relief operations to rescue villagers who were stranded in the mountains and tourist buses trapped along the inundated roads. "We spared no effort," he said. "With the help of the armed forces, we managed to put up tents to provide shelter for people; they were also supplied with blankets and LE25 each so they could make do temporarily. And the water that flooded the fields and roads was pumped out."

Shaker said his department was now working on providing the necessary health care to ensure that there would not be any outbreaks of disease, and also on rebuilding and reinforcing the spillways and their embankments.

But not all the villagers are happy with the performance of governorate officials. Many complained about the late

start of the rescue operations, a shortage of food, tents and blankets and insufficient medical care.

"We are aware of the discontent expressed by some, but this should be expected," Shaker responded. "Those people lost all they have and they expect us to replace everything they've lost in a few days, which is impossible."

The villagers are also worried about what the future holds in store. "Yes, we have a tent, blankets and food, but what is going to happen to us? Are they going to leave us in these tents for a long time? I have daughters of a marriageable age. Who would want to marry them if they lived in an open tent for a long time?" said Sayeda Kamal, a middle-aged peasant woman. "Something needs to be done," she concluded.

They agreed to leave the work-site, the minister said. The remainder decided to stay on.

In an ensuing debate, Ahmed Abu Zeid, leader of the National Democratic Party's majority in the house, described the rainfall as a disaster. "Advance preparations may have reduced the scope of the disaster, but provincial authorities should have shown a greater ability to deal with the situation," he argued.

Yassin Serageldin of the Wafd Party wanted to know how the government planned to deal with such disasters in the long term, since similar catastrophes were likely to recur. He also charged that several newly-constructed spillways did not comply with technical specifications.

Mahmoud Hassan El-Nassar, NDP deputy for Qena, said that despite the minister's declaration that the rains had been expected and advance preparations made, "the capability to deal with the flooding was obviously limited."

Sameh Ashour of the Nasserist Party blamed the government squarely for the losses caused by the rains and described what happened in Hurgghada as a disaster.

However, Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party, said the government must have learned from experience, because the floods had been handled better this year than in previous years.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Stunned, soaked and stranded

Al-Ahram Weekly reporter Rehab Saad was on her honeymoon on the Red Sea coast when the area was hit by torrential rains. She recounts the story of a hair-raising journey to flooded Hurgghada and the long wait endured before returning to Cairo

We were nearing the end of our honeymoon at the Serena Beach tourist village in Al-Quseir, when the heavens opened — with a bang of thunder and the flash of lightning — on the night of 16 November. It was still raining, a heavy, incessant downpour, the next morning — the day of our departure.

The rain had a curious effect at Serena Beach. After accumulating behind the fence of the village, the rainwater swept to the sea, carrying along large amounts of sand and pebbles. The colour of the sea turned muddy, and tourists went into action, capturing the bizarre scene on video cameras.

That day, we were due to make the trip to Hurgghada, a two-hour drive from Al-Quseir, and from there to board a flight back to Cairo. We were rather surprised when the hotel management provided a Jeep Cherokee to take us to Hurgghada, but it became apparent as we set out along the rain-washed road that driving conditions were very bad. Our driver had to slow down from time to time to avoid skidding. We were glad he did. Along the highway we saw trucks and buses which had skidded off the road and overturned, along with cars and minibuses driving through the desert to avoid the flooded route.

On reaching Safage, the situation worsened. The road was completely inundated and parts of it were covered by sand and gravel. Our driver had to make a detour through the desert until the road became passable again.

In Hurgghada, which we reached three hours after leaving Al-Quseir, the weather conditions were worse than ever. The downpour was continuing forcefully, sharply reducing visibility, and it was with great difficulty that our driver managed to reach the airport. Outside the airport compound, cars and tourist buses waited in a long queue. Their passengers shared one hope — to get into the airport and out of Hurgghada. But they were eventually turned away by an officer, who told them the airport had been closed because the runway was not safe for takeoff or landing.

The passengers had no choice but to leave the airport and check into nearby hotels, which were also awash in rainwater, keeping workers busy placing containers under leaking ceilings. The electricity was off and guests were supplied with candles. Telephones were not working and the hotel's computer had crashed.

Tourists sat with their luggage in the hotel lobby, waiting for news, any kind of news, understandably glum despite the efforts of the animation team to cheer them up with games. When darkness fell, the town was plunged into pitch blackness.

When we went down for breakfast the next morning, we looked through the windows to discover that the area was inundated with water. Cars and buses made their way through the floods, and people waded through water that reached to their knees. In some parts of the town the waters were higher: the inundation caused the Sindbad amusement park, the telephone exchange and several schools to practically disappear. As a result of the power failure, petrol stations and bakeries stopped functioning.

It was around 1pm on 18 November that the announcement was made that Hurgghada Airport had reopened. The passengers dashed back, hoping to catch a flight to Cairo but, presumably for reasons of space, they were all kept outside.

Airliners began arriving from the four corners of the world to pick up their nationals — with the exception of EgyptAir. Officials of the national carrier had no idea when a flight was scheduled. "We are waiting for a plane from Cairo but we do not know when," "We are not sure that there will be a plane today, go back to your hotels and we will contact you later," and "We have no connection with Cairo, we have to wait and see." One of them even said that "telephones are not working and so we cannot contact Cairo Airport."

The situation became more and more chaotic as passengers, including old people and children, waited outside the airport compound for EgyptAir to have mercy on them. Finally, at 6pm, it was announced that a plane would arrive from Cairo at 8.30 pm. Passengers, Egyptian and foreign alike, rushed through the airport doors, quickly filling up the halls and corridors. The EgyptAir flight arrived at 10pm and departed at 11pm, reaching Cairo at midnight.

'Preparations made in advance'

The minister of local administration reports that advanced warning and preparations reduced the scope of the disaster caused by the torrential rains that hit southern Egypt and the Red Sea coast

Mahmoud Sherif, minister of local administration, has said that the torrential rains that hit southern Egypt and the Red Sea coast in the middle of this month killed 11 people, destroyed or damaged 5,000 makeshift houses and flooded 6,000 feddans of land. Worst hit was the Red Sea governorate, where the rains destroyed around 2,000 mudbrick houses.

Municipal authorities had gone on the alert in September — weeks before the disaster — after the Scientific Research Academy issued a warning that southern Egypt and the Red Sea coast faced the prospect of flooding. Sherif said in a report to the People's Assembly. "All the governorates that were likely to be affected were contacted and asked to raise the degree of preparedness and make sure that relief supplies were available."

The cases of the New Valley in the Western Desert were the first to be hit on 12 November. Sherif reported. The following day, torrential rains fell on the governorates of Assiut, Sohag, Qena and Aswan, knocking down trees and power lines and damaging roads. On 14 November, the rains, buffeted by strong winds, lashed at a string of towns along the Red Sea coast, including Hurgghada, Safage, Al-Quseir, Marsa Alam and Shalatin. As a result, power and telephone lines were cut off, Hurgghada Airport was shut down and traffic along roads leading in the area came to a halt.

The rains continued to fall on southern Egypt and the Red Sea coast until 18 November, and life began to return to normal the following day. "Obviously we

can't stop the rains, but by making advance preparations, we have the ability to reduce losses, and this is what we did," said Sherif in his report on Sunday.

Turning his attention to the particular problems of the Red Sea governorate, Sherif explained that Hurgghada faced special difficulties because it has no spillways through which the rainwater can be channelled into the sea. "The tourist villages are built next to each other along the coastline, with no space in between. As a result, the town was completely flooded and its inhabitants were trapped by the inundation," he said. The electricity shortage caused water-desalination plants, bakeries and gasoline stations to stop functioning. Mosques, schools and youth centres were opened to provide shelter for the homeless and the armed forces stepped in to distribute relief supplies and set up shelter camps in Hurgghada, Safage, Al-Quseir, Marsa Alam and Shalatin, Sherif reported.

"The real rescue and relief operations in the Red Sea governorate were carried out by the armed forces," the minister added. The armed forces had used helicopters to fly in bread and other supplies, and, with the telephone lines down, had brought in wireless equipment to establish radio contact between Hurgghada and Cairo. On 18 November, Hurgghada airport reopened and many tourists, who had been stranded in the Red Sea resort, were flown out by military C-130 transports as well as EgyptAir planes, Sherif said.

Military helicopters were also sent in to rescue 255 workers stranded in a desert area, but only 115 of

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An Iraqi woman shops at a market in Baghdad on Monday (photo: Reuters)

ممكن من الأصل

Scalfaro cometh

Something's afoot. Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro's visit to Egypt between 29 and 30 November is the latest of several high-powered Italian missions in Egypt in the past couple of months. First, we had the visit by Italian Defence Minister Beniamino Andreatta, who was here in mid-October. Next came Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi on 21 October. Then we had Massimo D'Alema, the secretary-general of Italy's major political party, the Democratic Party of the Left, a couple of days later. Next Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini came to attend the third Middle East-North Africa Economic Conference (MENA III). And now the president himself is here. What's up?

The first observation to make about relations between Egypt and Italy is that they have never been better. Earlier attempts at establishing a close working relationship between the two nations had been less than successful. There was a time when Italian residents in Egypt, traditionally the second largest contingency of foreign nationals resident in the country after the Greeks, lost property and had to flee the country following the tide of nationalisations. Yet, unlike the case with some other Western nations, differences between Italy and Egypt were usually treated with mutual respect. Let's not dwell on the past. Top-level visits today reflect the importance both sides attach to strengthening relations.

Scalfaro's visit comes at a time when Italy is within sight of meeting the European monetary union criteria. This week, the European Union's ministers of finance and the governors of Europe's central banks accepted the re-entry of the Italian lira into Europe's Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). The lira, along with other European currencies, withdrew from the ERM in September 1992. Italy's savings rate is among the highest in the world. The lira's re-entry reflects its stability. Inflation in Italy is down to 2.6 per cent — its lowest rate since 1969 — and Italy's balance of payments now shows a surplus of over \$17.3 billion.

Italy is Egypt's most important trading partner. Italian exports to Egypt stood at \$1,903 million in 1993, \$2,168 million in 1994 and \$1,962 million last year. Italian imports from Egypt stood at \$1,442 million in 1993, \$1,940 million in 1994 and \$1,786 million last year. Imports from Egypt are, in order of importance, petroleum, other oils, aluminium, cotton yarn, raw cotton, textile cotton fibres, aircraft parts, cotton tissues, light oils and wool. The main Italian exports to Egypt include non-electrical machinery, plastic goods, mechanical goods, electrical equipment, cars, iron and steel products, car parts, chemical products, paper and cardboard.

On the eve of Italian President Scalfaro's visit to Egypt, Gamal Nkrumah reports on how the two Mediterranean countries are seeking better relations



Italian President Scalfaro

Petroleum accounts for 54 per cent of all Egyptian exports to Italy.

There is no stopping Italy's economic miracle. Italy's gross domestic product per capita far exceeds that of Britain and rivals that of France. There is no holding back Italy's largesse — at least in the technical cooperation and development areas. Only last week, Italy's Association of Textile Machinery Producers provided four scholarships to students at Alexandria University to pursue technical training at Italian universities. The Don Bosco School for higher technical and industrial education in the heart of the sprawling Cairoke suburb of Shubra is "living proof of Italy's commitment to technological transfer to Egypt," according to its director, Giuseppe Baisardo. The school, which has branches elsewhere in Cairo and Alexandria, provides teenagers and young people in their twenties with technical skills in key Egyptian industries. The school, a unique initiative launched in 1970, is specifically tailored to the demands of Egypt's labour market, Baisardo assured. To date, over 2,000 students have graduated from Don Bosco and the vast majority have been gainfully employed since," he added. Italy supports Don Bosco through direct contributions, the construction of the premises, supplying equipment for laboratories and paying the teachers' and technical instructors' salaries — there are some 50 Italian teachers and 500 students. Fees are a very affordable LE500 per academic year.

But pride of place for Italy's aid and development projects to Egypt undoubtedly goes to the Esna Dam — Egypt's second-largest after the Aswan High Dam. Italy funded the Esna Dam project through a \$108 million soft loan. President Hosni Mubarak inaugurated the dam in June 1995. Apart from increasing electricity production, the new dam has improved navigation; the old Esna barrage permitted the transit of

only one ship at a time. The new dam also led to the increase in the level of the River Nile by 1.5 metres — providing extra water for agricultural, industrial and domestic uses.

The wastewater treatment plant in El-Gabal El-Astar is yet another concrete example of Italian assistance to Egypt. Again funded through soft loans totalling \$96 million, the plant is a key part of the Greater Cairo Wastewater Project. The Medical Research Institute of Alexandria is being expanded through an Italian grant of \$16.4 million and under close collaboration with the World Health Organisation. The project entails the construction of a new building to house laboratories and clinical diagnostic services, the establishment of a bio-medical library and the publication of a quarterly review aimed at improving knowledge about health among local health workers. The project also trains Egyptian medical doctors at Italian government expense, and conducts joint research projects in the field of infectious diseases.

But Italian officials concede that fine words, promising plans and existing projects cannot eliminate residual uneasiness about sticky issues like immigration. Italy's ambassador in Egypt, Francesco Aloisi, concedes that the subject is rather touchy one. "There are many complaints and problems concerning the issuing of visas," the ambassador said. "In fact, it is the only serious problem that I face in Cairo," he confessed.

"The visa problem is part real and part psychological and illusory. We have many applicants who come with false papers. We have to scrutinise the papers," Aloisi explained. "Of the one million foreign workers in Italy, only 35,000 are Egyptian. We do not know the exact number of illegal workers in Italy today. We must not forget that Italy grants 200 to 300 Egyptians the Italian nationality every year."

Gianluigi Melega, a distinguished Italian journalist and writer on international affairs with the weekly L'Espresso, told Al-Ahram Weekly: "Regularising the status of foreign workers in Italy has become a most important issue in Italy today. For at least the next three months, African, Asian, Albanian and Bosnian migrants will be able to enter the EU through Italy confident that the most they risk is an unenforceable expulsion order. Italy today cannot deport illegal Third World and Eastern European immigrants. The Italian rightist parties such as the Northern League are furious. They want to make political capital out of this," he added.

"The deportation of illegal immigrants had been regulated by a decree which was issued last year at the Northern League's insistence. Its expiry this month means that an estimated 5,000 illegal immigrants served with expulsion orders under the provisions of the Northern League-instigated decree will be able to reside in Italy indefinitely," Melega said. Under pressure from the left, the decree included provisions whereby illegal immigrants who could prove they had a job could regularise their stay in Italy and eventually obtain Italian citizenship. As a result of the expiry, about 250,000 people who had provisionally been granted permission to remain in Italy now find their future in Italy uncertain. Italy has been excluded from the Schengen group of EU states which cooperate on law and order and immigration issues precisely because other EU partners criticise what they see as Italy's inability to close its frontiers to the incoming tide of immigrants from Third World countries, especially those on the south coast of the Mediterranean.

Many stories about Egyptian immigrants to Italy appear to be uplifting, but not Ahmed's. A fugitive from Italian justice who neither understood nor believed in, he returned helter-skelter back to Egypt after spending "a terrible time" in Italian jails for a legion of petty crimes. Horror stories abound about pathetic hopes and dreams of a better life in a fabled land of opportunity across the Mediterranean ending up as nightmares. Ahmed and those of his ilk long stopped yearning for the fantastic lifestyle just beyond their grasp that they thought Italy offered.

Still, the immigration issue must not be allowed to overshadow the unusually bright prospects of warmer Egyptian-Italian relations. "What many do not realise is that Italy and Egypt have been working closely together to many different spheres and in many parts of the world. Few realise that Egyptian and Italian troops have been working side by side in Bosnia," Aloisi said.

Hijacked plane crashes off Africa

A HIJACKED Ethiopian airliner carrying 176 people ran out of fuel and crashed into the ocean near a tropical resort in the Comoros Islands off east Africa this week. Wire service reports said 123 people were killed.

Miraculously, 53 people survived Saturday's crash of the Boeing 767, which broke into three pieces. Dozens were trapped in the fuselage wreckage about 700 metres from shore. Among the casualties was the internationally renowned photographer, Mohamed Amin. Islanders scrambled out in small boats to look for survivors, but rescue efforts were hindered by rough seas and fears of explosives aboard the aircraft.

The plane was destined for Abidjan in the Ivory Coast after stops in Nairobi, Kenya; Brazzaville, Congo; and Lagos, Nigeria. It was carrying 164 passengers and 12 crew members, Ethiopian Airlines said. According to the Ethiopian minister of transport, the hijackers, three Ethiopian opposition activists, had demanded that the plane take them to Australia. Recently released from jail, they were allegedly armed with a bomb, an axe and a fire extinguisher. Co-pilot Yonas Mekuria said the hijackers refused to allow the pilot to land at the airport in Moroni in the Comoros Islands, about five miles from the crash site, although the plane was running out of fuel. Ethiopian Airlines offers more flight connections within Africa than any other African airline. It is one of the continent's oldest airlines and until recently has been regarded as one of the best run in the world.

Clinton attends APEC summit

UNITED STATES President Bill Clinton this week joined leaders from 17 nations of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in the Philippines for an economic conference designed to breathe new life into efforts to promote global free trade. Signalling an apparent thaw in Sino-US relations, Clinton attended a private meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin on Sunday, sparking an outcry from human rights groups. The US is actively trying to foster better relations with China at a time of numerous differences over issues such as trade, human rights, American arms sales to Taiwan and China's application to join the World Trade Organisation. "Confrontation and containment is not the direction the US is going in with China," US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said in a statement in the Philippine capital Manila on Saturday. Both countries have a big interest in advancing trade and containing North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons programme. The economic stakes were hammered home when the US government this week reported that the US trade deficit with China widened to an all-time high of \$4.73 billion in September.

Clinton also met privately on Sunday with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to talk about trade disputes and with South Korean President Kim Young Sam to discuss tensions on the Korean Peninsula. APEC has made a commitment that its richer members will be practising free trade by 2010 and its poorer ones by 2020. Monday's summit was preceded by several days of protests in Manila by anti-imperialist, left-wing demonstrators who charge that APEC's stated goal of free trade will harm local economies and the lives of the poor.

Fossil fuel emissions up

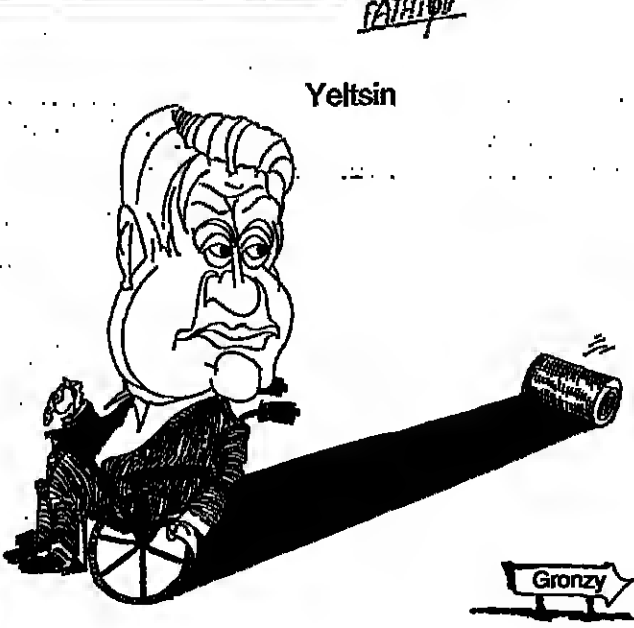
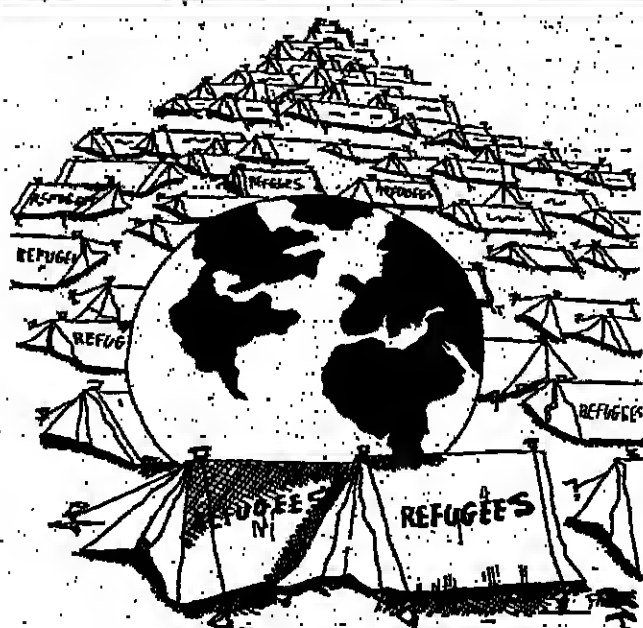
EMAD El-Sharkawy, the head of the Egyptian division of the World Energy Council (WEC), has announced that, in the world outside the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel burning rose by 12 per cent between 1990 and 1995.

On current trends, commitments made by the industrialised countries under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to reduce their fossil fuel emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000 are unlikely to be met in most cases. Over the 1990-95 period, emissions from the United States and Canada rose by nearly six per cent. Emissions from Japan rose by 12 per cent, while the corresponding figure in Australia was eight per cent. Emissions in Germany, Britain and France in 1995 were, however, slightly less than in 1990.

Over the 1990-95 period, the Asia-Pacific region, excluding Japan, Australia and New Zealand, showed a 30 per cent increase in emissions. The corresponding figures for the Middle East, Africa and Latin America were 35 per cent, 12.5 per cent and eight per cent respectively. By contrast, emissions in the former Soviet Union were at 70 per cent and in Eastern Europe 75 per cent of their 1990 levels due to economic decline. The WEC expects rising population and economic development in Third World countries to push global carbon dioxide emissions higher. By 2020, the WEC expects the developing countries to account for some 50 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions.

Yeltsin's Chechnya U-turn

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin's Chechen policy last week took a U-turn as the president ordered the two remaining Russian brigades out of Chechnya, paving the way for a new agreement signed on Saturday by his government and the Chechen separatists. The peace accord brokered by former National Security Council Chief Aleksandr Lebed in August stipulated the withdrawal of Russian troops from the breakaway republic by the end of the year. Nevertheless, Russian officials had, until now, insisted that the two brigades remain in Chechnya on a permanent basis. Chechen leaders have repeatedly called for the Russian brigades to be withdrawn, claiming their presence would obstruct plans to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in Chechnya on 27 January. Oil-rich Chechnya is a major refining centre and lies along the route of a strategic pipeline carrying Caspian Sea oil to the Black Sea.



US colour bias lingers on

A lawsuit charging oil giant Texaco with discrimination against African Americans is hampering right-wing politicians' attempts to do away with affirmative action, writes Garland Thompson

Sooner or later, everything in the United States ends up in court. Alexis de Tocqueville, the peripatetic French observer, saw that quintessential American fact more than 180 years ago, and it is as apparent now as ever.

The most recent example is the nasty debate over affirmative action, the programme to open up education, job opportunities, housing and business opportunities to African Americans, women, the disabled and other people of colour. Californian voters just passed a "civil rights initiative" after a petition drive to block affirmative action, ending into law a prohibition against "race preferences" in state law. Proponents, led by two right-wing scholars and a black businessman and University of California trustee named Ward Connerly, argue for a "return" to a "colour-blind society". Reverend Jesse Jackson called the move, a "civil wrongs initiative", and many African Americans feared it would turn into a precedent for the nation.

Now a lawsuit against the oil giant Texaco has reminded reluctant whites that there never was a colour-blind society in America, that the job of fighting racial prejudice is far from over. It has provided damning revelations that energised African American protest leaders, deeply embarrassed many whites and cast into doubt the future of a national attack on affirmative action.

The lawsuit, filed two years ago by six black women who claimed they were blocked from promotions, turned into a "class action" lawsuit on behalf of 1,500 African American Texaco workers after the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) looked into the case. What made it a national cause célèbre was the stunning revelation that the records relied on by the EEOC and the plaintiffs' lawyers were doctored. White executives had plotted to destroy evidence of their company's record of discrimination at a meeting discussing the lawsuit, using racial slurs such as "nigger" and "black-jelly beans" in acknowledging that African Americans received far fewer promotions than their white counterparts. One executive, Richard A. Lundwall, had made secret tape recordings of the 1994 meetings, to help him in preparing meeting notes. Later, angry over his termination in a Texaco corporate "downsizing", Lundwall connected the plaintiffs' lawyers and gave them copies of the tapes. The New York Times broke the story just as Californian voters prepared to outlaw state affirmative-action programmes, prompting one newspaper columnist to ask what was wrong with "these people in California".

African Americans reacted with anger. Jesse Jackson met Texaco Chief Executive Officer Peter I. Bijl, along with Kweisi Mfume, president of the nation's

oldest and largest civil-rights group, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and a coalition of other civil-rights leaders, in mid-November. Mfume called for changes in Texaco's corporate culture, its leadership and its relationships with minority-owned sellers of products and services. Jesse Jackson called for a boycott, and he was supported by Emanuel Cleaver, the head of the National Conference of Black Mayors, and other black leaders.

Things happened fast after that. Texaco announced a \$176.1 million settlement in the lawsuit. Part of it would pay \$115 million to 1,400 current and former black employees, to provide 10 per cent pay raises to black employees and to spend \$35 million on a task force to open opportunities for blacks, monitor discrimination and to develop diversity training for its managers. Jackson and many other leaders continued their call for boycotts, however, and the US EEOC petitioned to intervene, saying it had not been involved in the settlement talks.

The uproar continued, as the Justice Department issued a warrant for Lundwall's arrest on criminal charges of destroying evidence. Prosecutors are seeking to determine how much evidence was destroyed, who knew about it and participated and whether unaltered copies of the records still exist. More criminal charges are likely to follow, with still more damaging revelations about bigotry in Texaco's senior ranks. Meanwhile in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the city pension board voted to disinvest its \$5.8 million in Texaco stock, which had already taken a \$1 billion loss in Wall Street trading. Lawmakers in Texas and Cincinnati, Ohio, also promised to push for disinvestment.

Across the country, African American groups and individuals have vowed to keep the pressure on Texaco, since the executives quoted on the tape are still employed at Texaco or, like Lundwall, are getting Texaco retirement benefits. USA Today columnist DeWayne Wickham noted that only two per cent of Texaco's senior managers are African American. Other analysts say Texaco's refusals to promote black employees make it the worst offending oil giant.

In yet another revelation, New York Times commentator Bob Herbert pointed out that Shell Oil Company, Texaco's intended partner in a multi-billion dollar merger of US refining and marketing operations, has its own dirty secrets of racial discrimination, brought out in another lawsuit by African Americans. Jim Morgan, president of Shell Oil Products Company, had written to reassure employees that "we have no intention of entering into any relationship that is not based on high ethical standards and the utmost respect for individuals."

But Herbert noted that Shell Oil and its oil products subsidiary are themselves defendants in two federal lawsuits in which they are charged with racial discrimination against black employees. The suits were filed in San Francisco and Houston by veteran Shell employees who alleged that, despite having worked hard for many years, they have been permanently relegated to low-paying, low-prestige positions because of their colour.

"One employee, an engineer named Jimmy Hunter, asked his supervisor why his career had stalled," Herbert wrote. "He said the supervisor replied, 'I don't know why you still have shackles around your ankles.'" All have told stories of similar degrading racial comments. The lawsuits are scheduled for trial next year.

Typically, corporate defendants call such plaintiffs troublemakers. Shell, for its part, said there was "no basis for the claims in these lawsuits," and termed the plaintiffs "valued employees." Herbert described the plaintiffs as "not troublemakers," but "people to whom trouble came unbidden. They have worked hard and all they have wanted was to be treated fairly. Instead, they have seen a succession of white employees come in behind them and zoom right past them. They look at the offices that line the corridors of power at Shell and the message they receive is that people of their colour cannot go there."

African Americans really did not need these lawsuits to tell them what the US Labour Department's Glass Ceiling Commission said in its famous report: that 95 per cent of all top executives are white men, and that most of the remainder are white women. The rest of the country did need the revelations coming out now, however, to remember that the bad old days for blacks are still not over, even after the US Supreme Court's 1954 decision overturned its 1896 opinion legalising racial segregation.

A recent New York Times report found that the quality of life had gone up for African Americans, that their education and employment rates were up and that their health had improved. That was comforting news to many of those fighting for equality in this land of opportunity, but the Texaco lawsuit, and the revelations it has provoked, show that America has a long, long way to go before it can proclaim itself a "colour-blind society" in employment or any other area.

The writer, editor of US Black Engineer magazine, is a former editor of The Philadelphia Tribune and The Crisis, the US's oldest African American newspaper and magazine. He has worked as a commentator and reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Baltimore Sun.



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Out on their ear

Tenants of agricultural lands are apprehensive that the implementation of a new law may leave them homeless. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The start of the 1996-97 agricultural season this month marks the beginning of the end in a five-year grace period afforded to tenants of rented agricultural land by a 1992 rental law. The law, which offered a five-year transitional period before the Agrarian Law of 1952 elapsed, sought to re-organise the relationship between tenants and landowners of agricultural lands, and raised the rental value of agricultural land from 7 to 22 times the value of the land tax in order to redress injustice done to landowners whose rental income had quickly diminished over the years. This June 1992 law also symbolised a dramatic move by the Egyptian government to dismantle the decades-old socialist agricultural system which gradually limited individual ownership of agricultural lands from 200 feddans in 1952 to 50 feddans in 1969.

Agricultural liberalisation policies, implemented over the last five years, were expected to raise prices, enabling farmers to increase their crop revenues and, in turn, be able to afford paying the increased rent. However, these policies have also resulted in an increase in the price of production inputs and have raised interest rates on agricultural loans. Consequently, many farmers fear that they will not be able to pay the higher rents and may be forcibly evicted from the land.

Now, with one year to go until the implementation of a new law that would enable landowners to evict them for failure to pay their rent on time, tenants are concerned that they could find themselves out of home and hearth.

Abdel-Hamid Ghazi, a veteran member of parliament for Qalini in Kafr El-Sheikh, said the threat of eviction now tops the list of farmers' worries.

Ghazi, who chaired the farmers' secretariat of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), the sole legal political party in the 1960s, noted that farmers have been hard-hit by the government's liberal-

isation policies, which have increased input costs and resulted in reduced crop prices.

The costs of production, Ghazi said, have rocketed from between 300-600 per cent over the past two years, eating up farmers' profits and leaving them unable to pay debts owed to the Principal Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit (PBDAC). He added that in the last summer season, small-scale farmers shouldered substantial losses when the liberalisation of the fertiliser market pushed prices from LE21 to LE90 per packet of fertiliser.

He predicts that if these conditions continue in the current agricultural season, nearly one million small-scale farmers will be unable to pay the higher rents next year. Therefore, he said, it is imperative that the 5-year grace period be extended another five years, during which the Ministry of Agriculture should quickly implement its long-delayed Agricultural Takaful (mutual support) Fund (ATF).

The idea for the ATF was mooted in March 1993 to cushion farmers against crises such as fertiliser shortage or floods and to compensate them for any drops in revenues due to a slump in crop prices. However, he says, the fund, which is essential for protecting farmers against negative effects of liberalisation policies, has not materialised.

While some opposition parties have also called for an extension of the grace period, others argued that the government should implement the new law on schedule as an indication of its commitment to liberalising the economy.

Among those arguing for the extension was the leftist-oriented Tagammu Party,

implementing this law now, in light of the grave problems confronting farmers, will not only result in social tension, but also affect the agricultural sector itself. Many landowners, he argued, know very little about farming and could use the land for other initiatives that could adversely affect the national economy.

the establishment of a number of support funds necessary to protect farmers, but would also give the government the time to smoothly implement its land reclamation programme by its target date of the year 2000. This programme would create more job opportunities in the agricultural sector.

to 16 per cent, a sack of urea (a type of fertiliser) rose from LE14 to LE30," said Amer.

For this reason, said Amer, the law should be amended, not by extending the transitional period by another five years, but to allow a gradual, annual increase of the rental rates by 5 per cent — taking into account both production costs and crop revenues.

"This will both guarantee that farmers will not be seriously hit by any significant rise in land rent and that the law will be fully implemented by the year 2000."

Although a considerable number of NDP members in parliament object to the implementation of the law in the coming period, another group asserts that its implementation is inevitable.

According to Ahmed Abu-Zeid, leader of the NDP parliamentary majority, most of the fears surrounding the application of the law are quite exaggerated.

"This law takes into account the interests of both parties, tenants and landowners," said Abu-Zeid.

Extending the transitional period, he added, will not only complicate the problem, but will also put in question Egypt's keenness to move to a completely free market economy.

"Failing to liberalise the tenant-landowner relationship in agriculture will also lead to another failure to liberalise this relationship in the housing sector," said Abu-Zeid. "The success in liberalising these two sectors will not only put Egypt on the right path for a free-market economy, but also greatly help it face up to the challenges of free-trade," he added.

For its part, the People's Assembly approved this week a new law that freezes for five years the tax levied on agricultural crop prices in an attempt to offset the expected rise in land tenancy rates and give crop prices an advantage in competition with foreign crop imports.



photo: Al-Ahram

which recently submitted to parliament a draft law that mainly seeks to extend the transitional period to the year 2000. According to Tagammu MP Rafat Seif, the new law could result in chaos in the countryside as countless farmers are evicted from lands on which they have resided all their lives.

The problem, Seif explained, is that im-

"I'm quite sure that the government is fully aware of the potentially disastrous impact of the new law, but the problem is that the implementation of this law, is a basic part of the programme agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)," said Seif. However, he noted, the Tagammu Party believes that another five years would not only offer ample time for

Party (NDP) MP Mohamed Hassan Amer, believes that the application of the new law will deal a heavy blow to farmers. According to Amer, the value of the feddan output has been constantly declining while production costs are going up.

"For example, the price of diesel rose from LE2 to LE3 per can, the interest rate on PBDAC's credit, on the average, rose

PA to slash auto tariffs

THE PEOPLE'S Assembly is expected to approve shortly a new law, introduced last October through a presidential decree while the Assembly was not in session, that amends customs tariffs in line with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The law would effectively reduce the tariffs on imported cars with engines exceeding 2,000cc from 160 to 135 per cent. The tariff on cars with an engine capacity below 1,300cc would be reduced from 70 to 35 per cent. This category accounts for 70 per cent of the demand on the local market.

The new law also cuts customs rates from 60 per cent to 45 per cent on some jets and plastic products, and from 40 to 30 per cent on some iron and steel products. Tariffs on imported gold bullion will also be reduced from five per cent to one per cent.

According to the Assembly's Finance and Budget Committee's report, the new law is aimed at introducing a gradual tariff reduction in order to encourage Egyptian products in quality competition with their imported counterparts. The report added that the new tariff reduction is expected to raise the living standard of Egyptian citizens as it will lead to a reduction in the price of both foreign and local products.

According to the report, the recent reduction in tariffs is a sequel to other cuts introduced by Egypt over the last few years. In February 1994, the "co-ordinated tariff" law was introduced, which gave the government more flexibility in changing tariff categories, thereby enabling it to reduce tariffs on more than 70 items to 10 per cent.

The new law, according to the report, will result in an LE17 million loss in tariff revenues on imported cars, but the government will compensate for this loss by raising the sales tax on these cars from 30 per cent to 45 per cent.

FIPA signing

AN AGREEMENT designed to protect Canadian investments in Egypt was signed last week by Egypt's Minister of Economy Nawal El-Tatawy, and Canada's Ambassador to Cairo Michael Bell.

The agreement, known as the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA), aims at encouraging Canadian investors to tap into the Egyptian market by providing greater protection for their investments.

"This bilateral agreement provides an increased level of protection to Canadian firms doing business, or wishing to do business, in Egypt," said Bell. "The FIPA will be beneficial for both our countries."

Urban growth peril

The results of a recent study undertaken by Cairo University's Centre for Environmental Hazard Mitigation (CEHM) revealed that the expansion of urban areas is eating away the fertile agricultural lands of the Delta. The study launched by a group of researchers from the CEHM sought to utilise satellite imagery to monitor the extent of urban encroachment on Delta lands over the past three decades.

Surprisingly, following nine months of extensive investigation, it was not growth around the main cities of the Delta that was cited by the report, but the rapid expansion of smaller, yet numerous, villages which posed the largest threat to Egypt's already-limited agricultural lands.

The study revealed that the urban areas, villages and cities, within the Delta, the fertile triangle which represents over 90 per cent of Egypt's total agricultural lands, have doubled in size between 1972 and 1990.

According to the study, in 1972, urban areas ac-

counted for approximately three percent of the total area of the Delta. But by 1990, this area reached nearly six per cent of the Delta. "If this trend continues, an additional six per cent of the cultivated land of the Delta will be transformed into urban areas by the year 2010," said Mohamed Sultan, CEHM Project Manager.

He urged the concerned ministries to work out a plan, based on the satellite data, to monitor urban encroachment on an annual basis. He suggested comparing recent satellite data of the Delta to the information accumulated during previous years in order to determine where urban encroachment has taken place.

Sultan also recommended the immediate removal of any encroachment on agricultural lands as a deterrent measure.

Regarding the erosion of the coastline and the encroachment of the sea on Delta lands, Sultan said that since the construction of the High Dam, the River Nile waters draining into the Med-

iterranean Sea no longer carry the silt and clay which used to act as a protective layer for the Delta. "As a result, the sea is constantly eating into the Delta and eroding the shoreline," Sultan said.

Analysis of satellite imagery data of the Mediterranean coast indicated that the areas most threatened by coastal erosion are located at the point where the Nile's main tributaries, Rosetta and Damietta, meet the Mediterranean. An area at the tip of the Rosetta tributary, nearly 800m long and 3km wide, was eroded away between 1984 and 1990. At the tip of the Damietta tributary, and to the east of it, a stretch of land, approximately 5km wide and 12km long, is now largely submerged under the Mediterranean waters. The rest of the coast line has undergone minor changes. Sultan said that to tackle this problem, a number of wave breakers have to be erected at carefully selected areas where coastal erosion is at a maximum, such as Damietta and Rosetta.

Remedy fund under way

The Egyptian market is witnessing the establishment of its first equity management fund. Reem Leila investigates the benefits of the new entity

Plans for Egypt's first equity management fund are scheduled to move into the implementation phase over the next few weeks. The fund, the first of its kind in Egypt, is set up to purchase loss-making companies, restructure them and provide them with the needed financial, administrative and technical assistance. These companies, expected to be mainly debt-ridden public sector enterprises, will then be sold to either a private investor or, possibly, to the original owner.

According to Nader Ezzeddin, general manager of the Investment Trustees at the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), the idea of such a fund was originally put forth by the NBE in response to requests made by numerous investors. "NBE first had to be sure that the Egyptian capital market is ready to receive such a new concept, so the bank undertook a thorough examination of the market to see if the timing for the establishment of such a fund was right," said Ezzeddin.

Satisfied that the right climate was in place for the fund, the NBE applied for a license from the Capital Market Authority (CMA), allowing them to set up the fund.

Ezzeddin noted that only 50 per cent of the fund's LE140 million authorised capital has been provided by its three co-founders which, along with the NBE, are the Misr International Bank (MIB) and the Egyptian Investment Bank (EIB). The remaining portion of the capital will be raised through private subscriptions from a limited number of investors who will be allowed to contribute to the fund's equity. The list of these potential investors includes the African Development Bank (ADB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

"Investments in such funds are of a special nature as its yields are reaped in the long run. Investors must realise that they will not gain any profit before 4-6 years," said Ashraf Shamseddin, the CMA's vice-president. To accommodate the

fund, he noted that the CMA's regulations will be slightly amended, allowing for the formation of a totally separated, joint-stock, company of the fund that will manage the fund. Shamseddin also said that the company's board of directors will include a foreign expert in equity management funds. The company's capital, as distinct from the fund's capital, will total LE70 million, and will be covered by the fund's three co-founders.

Enthusiastic about the establishment of this new fund, Hani Tawfik, chairman of the fund's managing company, said that "it's about time this kind of enterprise was introduced in Egypt. It has proven to be successful both in Europe and in developing countries."

"The restructuring of a large number of loss-making companies will definitely benefit the Egyptian economy," he said, adding that the profits to be made in this kind of business are huge. "An investment of LE10 million promises a return of up to LE70 million," stated Tawfik.

Market report

GMI surges

THE GENERAL Market Index recorded an increase of 12.29 points to close at 253.94 points for the week ending 21 November. The surge in the GMI, however, came as an surprise as most Egyptian companies, during this time of the year, are posting their end-of-year statements.

Market turnover totaled LE128 million for the week, with the most significant increase in share value being realised by the Medinet Nasr Housing and Development Company (MNHD). The company's shares closed at LE242 per share, after witnessing a 31 per cent gain over their opening price. Trading in MNHD's stock accounted for 11 per cent of the total market transactions for the week.

Shares of the Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation Company also registered an increase, gaining LE30 per share before leveling off at LE210. This recovery came amid news of the less-than-expected 5 per cent offering of the company's shares.

Investors in shares of milling companies had reason to cheer as shares of the North Cairo Mills Company gained an impressive LE25.48 per share to close at 139. Similarly, shares of the

Middle and West Cairo Mills Company increased in value by LE15.29 to level off at LE76.

Also on the rise was the financial index, which registered a 22-point increase as shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) registered a 14 per cent increase in value to close at an even LE500. Analysts cited the B-rating assigned to the bank by the London-based IBCA rating company as the main reason for the surge in share value. IBCA ratings evaluate the creditworthiness of the bank.

Mirroring CIB's gains, shares of the Misr Exterior Bank closed at LE650 after gaining LE50 per share. The Egypt Chemical Industries Company, however, had the dubious distinction of being the market's biggest loser for the week, as its shares lost 14.21 per cent of their value to close at LE163.

In all, the shares of 47 companies increased in value, 14 decreased and 27 remained unchanged.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

MENA III balance sheet

Egypt and the Arab world succeeded in putting their best foot forward during MENA III. But, argues Mona Qassem, significant reforms are still required

Unlike its Casablanca and Amman counterparts, the MENA III conference in Cairo placed greater emphasis on inter-Arab and Arab-European cooperation than on the establishment of a Middle East common market. In this light, the success of the conference was a direct product of the political and economic conditions prevailing in the region at the time it was held.

However, what allowed the Arab world to benefit from this conference more than from its predecessors was the fact that the leaders of Arab countries had a clear and common vision — namely that there can be no comprehensive regional economic cooperation and integration without peace. In other words, full integration and cooperation hinge on the resolution of the outstanding issues troubling the Arab-Israeli peace process. But, more importantly, the Arabs were redefining the argument that economic cooperation will bring about progress in the peace process.

Israel has proven to the world that its government alone is responsible for the obstacles that have littered the path to peace and regional cooperation.

MENA III was also successful in correcting the misconception stemming from the last two regional economic conferences that Israel is the cornerstone for regional cooperation. At the Cairo conference, Israel was merely an other participant. Through their united position, the Arabs were able to prove to the international community that the centuries-old Arab identity cannot be erased. The conference reaffirmed Egypt's leadership of the Arab world and that Israel would not succeed in dominating its neighbours politically or economically. The conference also clarified the fact that the Arab economic boycott of Israel cannot be divorced from the peace process. This point was made quite clearly in Arab refusal to cooperate with Israel over the Netanyahu government's intransigent attitude towards peace.

At the conference, although the Israelis presented 139 projects valued at \$13.25 billion, these projects were not as publicised as in Casablanca and Amman. In fact, the Israeli delegation, as a whole, was not as warmly received as they thought they would. At MENA III, the Israelis discovered that when it came to hammering out deals with their Arab counterparts, they got nowhere. To do business with the Arabs, they discovered, the land for peace principle must go hand in hand with the economic cooperation.

On the domestic front, for Egypt, the conference was not only a chance for the host country to put its best foot forward. It was also an opportunity to promote Egypt as a lucrative investment option for the international community. In this respect, Egypt's success was highlighted by its ability to clinch the \$10 billion in projects it put forth as part of its portfolio.

Irrespective of how successful the conference was, however, a great deal of work remains to be done if Egypt is to be an active partner in the emerging global economy. Towards the realisation of this objective, Egypt must adopt and implement a plan to transform its economy into an export-oriented system which also provides real investment incentives that bolster development in the new industrial cities and the emerging, neighbouring communities. As such, two main obstacles must be overcome. First, worker and industrial productivity must be increased through the introduction of better and more efficient technology and increased incentives. The second obstacle relates to cutting through onerous red-tape and bureaucratic hurdles that consistently impede productivity, efficiency and sound management. These reforms should be implemented in all government institutions which, then, should also be charged with attracting investments in their fields.

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Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

It was Wednesday 3 August 1991 on a narrow street behind Hamamli Street in the Manshiya district of Alexandria, Stefano Lazzaro, an Italian thug whose job, in the words of *Al-Ahram*, was to "protect houses of ill repute," was celebrating his birthday with some of his friends in the home of a prostitute. They continued to eat and make merry until 4pm, when the woman, Maria Fumi, left to buy some soft drinks from the nearby ice salesman. An argument broke out between them. When he heard their voices, the Italian thug came outside and the quarrel escalated into a violent fight that resulted in the death of a police sergeant, Ahmed Mousa, who had been in the vicinity and attempted to intervene.

The incident, reported in *Al-Ahram*, would provoke a mainstream of repercussions. The report dispatched by the newspaper's Alexandria correspondent said: "At 4pm yesterday, a brawl erupted that virtually spread like wildfire from Maha Street to Café Europa and Anissat Street. The incident began when four Italians began a quarrel over a trivial matter in a narrow street located behind Hamamli Street. When a police officer in the vicinity attempted to break up the fight, one of the four men insulted him. The officer arrested the man and insisted on taking him to the police station. However, his three friends and two Italian women pounced upon the policeman and began to beat him violently in order to free their comrade. Suddenly, one of the men pulled out a knife and stabbed the policeman in his stomach. Then another took out a gun and shot him. The policeman fell to the ground, drenched in his blood, and died instantly."

"Upon hearing the gunshot, a throng of people rushed to the scene, a police officer in the vicinity with sticks and truncheons had been hit by their galabeyas in preparations for averting the stricken policeman. Shopkeepers hastened to close down their stalls and the Europeans, who had gathered fled in order to avoid getting caught up in the melee.

"One of the culprits rushed up to his home in an upper storey of an adjacent building,

grabbed his rifle and began to threaten anyone who approached. His associates then took refuge in one of the nearby warehouses. At that moment, the police arrived to arrest the men, but the criminals threatened to open fire, forcing the policemen to call in assistance. Meanwhile, police authorities dispatched an urgent telegram to the Italian Consulate and the deputy consul hastened to the scene. At that point, the police were able to arrest the four men and take them in a police van to the police station. The angry mob followed in pursuit of the van, hurling threats and insults. In the pandemonium, several Europeans were injured and an Armenian youth was assaulted.

"When they arrived near the station, the mob began to smash the windows of a café. Were it not for the timely arrival of a contingent of mounted police, they would have attacked its European customers. But hardly had the police dispersed the rioters from one area than they congregated in another, shouting and hurling threats. As a result, the occupation (British) troops were obliged to intervene."

"At 9pm security forces were finally able to disperse the crowds. A total of 12 people had been injured. All of them were Europeans and their injuries were very slight."

The European press in Egypt, notably the Italian language *Il Messaggero* and the French language *Le Réformateur* and *La Bourse Egyptienne*, launched a vehement outcry against the Egyptians. They were variously described as "barbarous, savage, fanatical, contemptible, treacherous," among other epithets. *Il Messaggero* also urged police protection for the Italian community in Alexandria. Although, *Al-Ahram* did not report what the Greek newspapers had to say about the incident, one may assume that they followed the same drift. Five out of the 12 Europeans wounded were Greek and many of the shops and warehouses that had to be closed down were Greek-owned.

That these newspapers would be prone to attacking Egyptians is understandable in light of the fact that the Greeks, Italians and French

157 Four Italian thugs stabbed and shot to death an Egyptian policeman in an Alexandria street in 1991. The incident sparked city-wide riots and caused a national uproar against foreigners. It also brought into focus the notorious capitulations system which provided that cases involving foreigners be heard by foreign courts. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** culls the story from reports published in *Al-Ahram*

accounted for approximately 70 per cent of the foreign population in Alexandria, according to the census of 1898. Out of a total of 46,118 foreigners, there were 15,182 Greeks (32.9 per cent), 11,743 Italians (25.4 per cent) and 5,221 French (11.3 per cent).

The European newspapers were also prone to exaggeration. They even reminded readers of the incident between a Maltese and an Egyptian which precipitated the events of June 1982 which prefaced the British occupation of Egypt three months later. The danger of this alarmist tone was that it provided the British a pretext to remain in the country.

The national press, naturally, could not be expected to remain silent. The counter-campaign launched by *Al-Liwa*, *Al-Mu'ayyid* and *Al-Ahram* was equally vehement. We will confine ourselves here to what our newspaper wrote.

It reminded, "It was a frightening incident that struck fear into every heart. When it observed, however, that the alarmist and sensationalist reporting could have dire consequences, it began to play down the incident and to urge restraint."

The newspaper enumerated the causes for the popular reaction. Although precipitated, the angry crowds were not an expression of a suppressed hatred for foreigners, but rather a reaction to the horror of the incident itself.

"This was not an expression of religious discrimination or mass revenge. It was a manifestation of the reaction of the wretched in any time or place," *Al-Ahram* said.

Al-Ahram then turned the reader's attention to the primary victim — the policeman who had died in the prime of his youth at the age of 30. "He had just received a promotion and he is the father of many children." The newspaper launched an appeal for donations for the grief-stricken family.

After seeking to contain the adverse "reaction" and to rouse sympathies for the victim and his family, *Al-Ahram* turned its attention to the "terror of the Italians" whose provocative acts against the Egyptian people had troubled several times before. Here *Al-Ahram* gave its answer to *Il Messaggero* and other European agencies that were attempting to incite the authorities and foreign powers against the Egyptians.

What did the Italian newspaper expect, *Al-Ahram* asked rhetorically, after the four Italians harried themselves at home, throwing stones at ordinary people and the governor, and hurling insults against the chief prosecutor? "The people can only perceive such actions as a form of warfare against the country and its system of law and order and as a flagrant insult to the Egyptian people and their morals. It is, therefore, not odd that people should rally to vent their anger when confronted by a matter such as this. If an Egyptian had killed an Italian policeman in Rome and then struck out at everyone else, would he be blessed and forgiven?"

In conclusion, the newspaper makes a direct appeal to the Europeans residing in Egypt:

"Keep your knives and guns away from us. We do not like our tranquillity disturbed by that sort of agitation. Are we savages for seeking to avoid bloodshed and are those blood shedders civilised? It is time that some foreign consuls act to safeguard the honour of their honourable subjects by expelling their evil-doers, or at least disciplining them."

Between the lines, the appeal strikes home at two core issues. The first is the accusation of fanaticism which the British levelled against the Egyptians as a pretext for perpetuating their occupation. The second is the protection foreigners enjoyed in Egypt by virtue of the capitulations system. These two issues gave the Hamamli incident its international dimension.

The national press did its utmost in the days following the incident to refine international charges of fanaticism against Egyptians. In its editorial of 17 August 1991, *Al-Ahram* wrote: "If Orientals agree on any matter, regardless of how trivial, Europe responds with the charge of religious fanaticism. They hold it against us as our greatest sin and nothing will rally all of Europe together so much as the call to combat it. It is the pretext the British use against us in Egypt and the argument other powers use against other peoples. Yesterday in Alexandria, the argument of religious fanaticism was used to defend a murderer."

The author diagnoses what the objective Egyptian view of Europeans should be — a source of knowledge. "If we want industry, we will acquire it from them. If we want commerce, we will learn it from them. We must therefore associate with them if we want to receive the knowledge we lack." However, "We have no need for that European who sits in bars and spends all his time gambling, nor the riff-raff, trouble-maker and sewer of corruption. What we want is the type of Europeans who are the mainstay of their civilization, literature and science." To refuse the former, it argues, cannot be taken in any sense as a form of anti-European fanaticism.

With regard to the capitulations system,

since the establishment of the mixed courts in 1876, the consular courts adjudicated in most criminal cases in which one or both of the litigants was a foreigner under their jurisdiction. The consul himself would generally preside over the judges panel which would also include two prominent expatriates from that particular community and the accused would be tried in accordance with the law of his native country. In the event that the consul deferred some criminal cases to the judicial system in his own country, those courts could not possibly deliberate the cases with the fullest impartiality. All they had at their disposal were memoranda and other documents. There would be no witnesses, cross-examinations or other methods of conducting thorough investigations.

The British occupation authorities were hoping to abolish the system and for a reason which was not denied by the reports submitted by Lord Cromer to London in the years subsequent to the Hamamli incident.

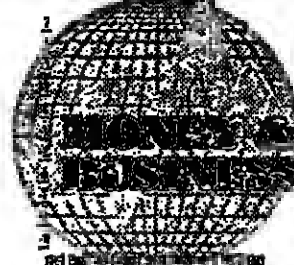
In one of these reports, Lord Cromer poses both sides of the question. On the one hand, he said that Egyptians found the prosecution of European criminals before mixed courts very provocative. On the other, he reasoned that since the law breakers among the expatriate communities constituted only a small minority, while the majority performed an important service in developing the country, to subject the minority to the national courts would frighten away those Europeans who are so active "in building its prosperity". After outlining the two sides of the question, Cromer proposed a happy compromise — at least from the British perspective: "The foreign states that enjoy capitulatory privileges should cede to Great Britain those aspects that pertain to legislative functions."

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Determination towards the future
SOLIMAN Reda, minister of industry and mineral wealth met with a press delegation that visited Cairo recently, and discussed the recent changes taking place within Egyptian industry, in addition to discussion ways of Egyptian-Syrian industrial co-operation. In answer to a question revolving around the position of Egyptian industry in the international market, he replied: "It is necessary that Egyptian industry does not gear its production towards the local market only, but rather that it makes a determined effort to enter the global market, where it can make a strong showing."

MONEY & BUSINESS



Business speak louder than words

THE ARAB International Insurance Co is celebrating its 20th anniversary. It was the first insurance company that was established within the framework of Law 43 of 1974 — a joint-stock company subject to the free zone law. Subsidiaries of the company are:

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Out of this excellent expertise, the Arab Inter-

national Insurance Co was able to upgrade insurance services. The company offers all consultancy services regarding insurance and offers all kinds of insurance. The company also provides re-insurance services locally and internationally. The Arab International Insurance Co, with many shareholders in its capital, which reflects the steady prospects it has, is keen to have many subscribers in the shares of its companies so as to multiply its sources of investment. Hassan Hafez, chairman of the board said:

Among the company's figures:

- The capital started with



The chairman and members of the board, and representative shareholders of Arab International Insurance Co. First row: Hassan Hafez; in between John Steel and Saad Aggad. Second row (l-r): Mohamed El-Sayed, Mr. Tawfik, Mr. Hossain, Mr. Subashi, Mr. Yasser, Miss Safwan, Al-Jawish, secretary of the board, Mr. Mazhar Akkas and Abdel-Mezin Imam.

- a sum of \$3. million, which later became \$60 million.
- Volume of investments have increased from \$2,400 million to \$20 million.
- Shareholders' equity up to \$7,520 million from \$1,795 million.

Confidence in Egypt displayed

A SURVEY carried out by the public opinion assessment unit of the Faculty of Commerce, Mansoura University, confirmed that 91 per cent of businessmen and investors expressed their belief that Egypt stands on top of Middle Eastern countries luring investments and ranked the fourth country worldwide, coming after Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.

A survey to measure public opinion with regard to investment in Egypt was also conducted by the faculty. 400 investors were ques-

tioned in the survey which provided answers as to what extent the Egyptian government can attract investments and how to eliminate obstacles impeding investments.

The study also showed that factors increasing investments are:

- Free dealing in foreign currency
- The expansion of the Egyptian market.
- The stability of the exchange rate.
- The potential stability that creates a favourable investment atmosphere.

OTC offers equity fund

ORIENT Trust Company (OTC), fully licensed by Egypt's Capital Market Authority, is raising LE50 million to invest in quoted equity securities traded on the Egyptian Stock Market which offer potential for significant growth. The opening date for the receipt of subscriptions will be 27 November. One can subscribe either through the OTC or at any branch of Misr International Bank. Managed by Egyptian Investment and Finance Company, with Dr. Farid W. Saad as chairman, it will be building on its in-depth knowledge of the Egyptian financial markets.

The OTC Equity Fund will extend its activities to portfolio investment through Egypt's growing stock exchange. The emphasis of the OTC Equity Fund will be selectivity. It will not merely track the market at large. It will position itself to take advantage of not only the wave of current government privatization but also the upcoming "initial public offerings" of the more successful private sector

companies. OTC's management is affiliated to the Egyptian Finance Company (EFC). It brings to the table a track-record of proven investment performance. EFC has been active since the late seventies and has increased its shareholders' equity during the last 15 years by an average compound rate of 22 per cent per annum, even after payment of substantial dividends.

Among the companies which EFC has helped establish in Egypt as a founding shareholder are EMB Electric Industries (Ticino), Industrie du Froid (Nestlé/Kimo), Leco Egypt, Xerox Egypt, Nestlé Egypt, Egyptian Tourism Investment Company (a closed-end investment company that invests in tourist projects), ETMA (Four Corners Restaurant), as well as Abu Soma Development Company (the largest privately financed resort on the Red Sea, covering a 10 million square metre peninsula). The OTC Equity Fund is suited for medium and long-

term investors who wish to achieve significant capital gains. It has also been made accessible to a wider range of potential investors with a minimum total subscription of LE10,000. Coupled with being among the lowest fee structure in the industry, the OTC Equity Fund is an efficient and cost effective way of entering the Egyptian Stock Market.

German-Arab Chamber of Commerce seminar
THE GERMAN-Arab Chamber of Commerce will organise a two-day seminar on top management and business strategies in international trade. The seminar will also discuss other topics such as resources management and other environment-related issues. In addition, some experiences of investors will be presented. Speakers in the seminar include Salah Hafez, head of the Environmental Affairs Organisation; Mohamed Farid Khamis, president of the Egyptian Federation of Industries and Alef Ebeid, minister of the public business sector.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Sticks and stones

There comes a point in any struggle for security where one must determine that the ends do not justify the means. To draw this line, a measure of careful inspection and an understanding of integrity are imperative. However, Israeli authorities have, time and time again, proven that they are either incapable of, or uninterested in, defining these parameters. The result of their indecision is that the Hebron troop redeployment is still stalled on the issue of "hot pursuit" and Israeli border guards have wholeheartedly embraced a brand of law enforcement which the American police force has long ago mastered — brutality. But unlike in the US, such a policy is, if not sanctioned, then condoned by the Israeli Supreme Court which, in line with the Netanyahu government's policies, believes that the use of torture or violence is an acceptable means of preventive justice. What next, planting evidence? Or maybe the old favourite where another settler beats to death yet another Palestinian child for allegedly chucking rocks at cars.

But, in defence of the two Israeli border guards filmed while assaulting Palestinian labourers, their actions must have been justified as being part and parcel of Israel's desire for security, peaceful coexistence with the Arabs and the drive for regional stability. They were, obviously, deterring a group of individuals who were hell-bent on causing trouble — perhaps by working in Israel. And while they may have been a touch overzealous in their efforts, they were undoubtedly following the lead of their distinguished prime minister who recently explained that expanding the Jewish settlements is an important step in helping Arabs and Israelis to learn how to live together.

As such, the lessons to be learned by the world, based on the Israeli example, are quite illuminating. So long as one is operating from a position of moral superiority — a morality which only comes from a Holocaust experience, for example, then strong arm tactics are justified if they are exercised in the name of peace and democracy. And we owe to any who oppose these tactics for such a trite reason as establishing an autonomous territory or crossing a border to go to work.

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AL-AHRAH, Al-Ghala St. Cairo.
Telephone: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
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Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Al-Fil Ghannam, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045, Tel: (202) 775-2121.
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Settlements block the horizon

Expansion of Israeli settlements constitutes an attempt to redraw the demographic map, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**. The only possible result is disaster



Binyamin Netanyahu's policies continue to propagate that atmosphere of hatred and violence that has brought the region to the brink of calamity. And the disaster that looms ahead will be a result not only of Israel's refusal to implement agreements already signed but of the deliberate attempt by the Israeli prime minister to breathe new life into settlement programmes in occupied Palestinian territory and the Golan Heights.

In so doing Netanyahu seeks to scupper, once and for all, the historic achievement of peace in the Middle East that so recently appeared to lie within our grasp. He has yet to learn the lessons of history. Henry Kissinger, former US secretary of state, put this bluntly when he said recently, "Israel's policies under Netanyahu have brought down the anger of the entire world. The US must come up with a new policy to halt this downward spiral."

Ominous words indeed. Yet today occupied Arab land is the scene of frenzied Jewish settlement activity as Jewish organisations vie to push through new housing projects in occupied Arab areas, from the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem to Gaza and the Golan Heights.

Many agencies are active in planning new settlements, including the Ministry of National Infrastructure, headed by Ariel Sharon, and the Ministry of Housing, currently headed by Meir Barash, a member of the ultra-conservative "Jews of the Torah" Party. These ministries are working in tandem with the Settlement Department of the Histadrut (The Israeli Trade Union Council), the assimilation department of the Jewish Agency, and existing settlement councils whose attempts to further expand their own settlements are backed by extreme right-wing parties and the Rabbinical Council which provide them with financial, moral and religious support.

On 9 November, as negotiations over the redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron continued, Netanyahu was meeting with groups seeking to establish new settlement sites in occupied East Jerusalem and in Hebron. Plans discussed included the building of 3,500 housing units in so-called Greater Jerusalem, 900 housing units in the Bitar settlement and 100 units in the Bajaj

Za'if settlement. In addition plans to revive the "Eastern Gate" project, involving the construction of 2,000 housing units, were mooted.

Ariel Sharon, meanwhile, seems intent on turning existing settlements into large urban conglomerations, in some cases into small cities, almost doubling the number of settlers in the West Bank to 280,000 within four years. According to the *Haaretz* newspaper of 5 November, the plan drawn up by the Histadrut's settlement department, directed by Sally Maridor, and the Jewish Agency's assimilation department, directed by Uri Gordon, is initially intended to attract religious Jews to settle in the West Bank in the hope that other, more moderate Israelis will eventually follow.

Plans put forward by Israel's Ministry of Housing concentrate on these areas with special significance for religious Jews, including Hebron. These plans come in the wake of the widely publicised announcement made on 10 October by a group of rabbis that "withdrawal from Hebron constitutes a betrayal of the principle of the land of Israel". Immediately Knesset members from the Likud Party, including a former deputy chief of public security, urged caution, because, said the latter, "when the rabbis speak, people

listen".

In the Golan Heights Netanyahu's personal responsibility for fuelling the settlement drive becomes obvious, not least in his constant prevarications over negotiations with Syria. One minute he announces readiness to renew negotiations, the next he is granting licences for oil exploration teams to start work on occupied Syrian land. He announces that he welcomes discussions with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa over resuming Syrian-Israeli negotiations next January, only to have the thunder stolen — not accidentally, surely — by his minister of defence's announcement that the Golan Heights are of vital strategic importance to Israel. The only conclusion one can draw is that Israel is playing for time, during which it will seek to radically alter the demographic make up of the area.

Israeli government plans for the Golan involve the construction of three new settlements consisting of a total of 900 housing units. That the Israeli prime minister's office has denied it authorised these settlements should fool no one, since it is perfectly consistent with an ongoing policy of obfuscation.

Netanyahu seems to have bought the ultra-

right's version of the Israeli project, stock and barrel. Their paranoia about the "Arab demographic time-bomb" that will defile their dreams of a "pure Jewish state" is one Netanyahu seems to share.

Consequently, it is not just Arabs within the Occupied Territories, whose position the present Israeli government seeks to undermine. Arab Israeli citizens are to be subjected to similar pressures. On 21 October the Ministry of Housing released plans aimed at creating a majority Jewish population in Galilee by expanding Jewish communities in a scheme that the Israeli media quickly dubbed "the Judaisation of Galilee".

We should not be fooled into thinking that Israel is using its settlement policies as a potential bargaining chip in any future negotiations. Rather, what we are witnessing is an attempt to realise the most extreme expression of the Zionist enterprise.

And in the midst of this flurry of settlement activity what do we hear? Netanyahu has the gall to announce that he is, after all, in favour of the peace process.

Can Israel's present government really be unaware that Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories is the cornerstone and only possible foundation of peace. We cannot, surely, be expected to believe that they do not realise their present actions are undermining any hope for peace?

The freezing of negotiations on all fronts and the continued expropriation of Arab lands leaves Arab parties no margin for manoeuvre. Tragically, though, it is not possible to freeze the negotiating process without risking outbreaks of violence. Steadily, the prospect of violence is hardening into an inevitability, and the first victim will be the peace process itself.

Egypt will do its utmost to prevent this from happening. And perhaps the international community will at last be galvanised into action, bringing pressure to bear on an Israeli government that seems intent on pushing the region over the brink, destroying any prospect for peace in its seeming determination to engulf the peoples of the region in disaster.

Fundamentalism, an accident?

The historic city of Caen hosted last week an international conference on the theme *From Religion to Fundamentalism, from Peace to War?* **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** took part in the meeting

At a conference held last week in the city of Caen, birthplace of William the Conqueror and home to the famous World War II memorial celebrating the Allied landing in Normandy, I was asked to define the phenomenon of fundamentalism apart from its religious connotations. In my talk, I emphasised the fact that fundamentalism in the so-called "post-bipolar" world order is far from being a transient, accidental or regional phenomenon but is an essential feature of the present state of the world.

For although bipolarity in its traditional form has disappeared with the disappearance of the East-West confrontation, it is still very much with us, albeit in more insidious forms. In the space dimension, it has assumed the form of a North-South confrontation, while in the time dimension it is there in the form of a deep division between those who identify themselves with an ideal world in the future and others who attribute themselves to an idealised world in the past. The former ascribe themselves to a planetary identity; the latter to the specificity of a clan, a tribe, an ethnic group, a race, a sect or a religion.

The Cold War witnessed the replacement of an ideological bipolarity between capitalism and communism by other forms of bipolarity, mainly of a military nature, between two blocs. Indeed, the East-West bipolarity which started out as a class-against-class struggle degenerated into a missile-against-missile confrontation. When the Star Wars programme launched by Ronald Reagan extended the arms race into outer space, the USSR could no longer cope with the new challenge, and Gorbachev tried to salvage the structure of East-West bipolarity in the absence of an arms race with an ideological face-lift which he called perestroika. But perestroika failed, and the Soviet Union, followed by the entire socialist camp, collapsed, proving that the key factor that had kept it from breaking down earlier was the military parity sustained through the arms race, and not ideology.

As the unfolding of historical processes failed to substantiate the teachings of authoritarian ideologies, a tendency towards individualism, fed by a

growing call for democracy and human rights, developed. According to Marx, the emancipation of humankind depended on the emancipation of a given class whose historical role transcended the subjective outlook of any observer. Later, Einstein developed his Theory of Relativity according to which the same objective reality would appear differently to two differently located observers. In other words, the subjective factor cannot be discounted in the perception of objective reality. For example, if a given community perceives itself as condemned to a future of frustration, unemployment, marginalisation, etc. and sees its salvation as lying in returning to a glorified past, this subjective perception can appear to that community as objective reality. This is the essence of fundamentalism.

A statement made by Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti eloquently illustrates how subjective perceptions can shape objective reality. A notorious atheist, Togliatti once remarked: "I do not know if God exists in the sky, but he certainly exists in the minds of Italy's Christian Democrats. God is thus a political force and, as such, He exists."

The crises triggered by the expanding role of 'the subject', i.e., the independent citizen, are further complicated by the fact that they coincide with a contemporary world phenomenon: one is the acceleration of history brought about by the rapid pace of scientific and technological progress; the second is the shrinking of the planet brought about by one of the most striking aspects of that progress, namely, the information revolution. Both phenomena contribute to feelings of insecurity which can be assuaged by turning to the past.

Actually, there seems to be a critical threshold beyond which it is possible for a society to move forward at an ever increasing pace (e.g. the Asian Tigers), and below which a society is condemned to remain a prisoner of its past. Nor does the diminution of distances between communities necessarily make them feel closer. Sometimes the opposite holds true, and, if one community is perceived by another as encroaching on its patrimony, it is cast by the latter as an aggressor.

Thus the shrinking of the planet can actually deepen disparities instead of eliminating them.

These developments are occurring concomitantly with radical changes in the philosophy of science, which is witnessing the breakdown of certainties and the replacement of deterministic laws by statistical laws, making religion the only remaining field of certainty. Islam is not the only religion to have witnessed a revival in this age of uncertainty. Other manifestations of the same phenomenon can be seen in the growing influence of the Jewish religious parties in Israel as well as in the growth of fundamentalism among several Christian sects, notably in the United States.

An interest has thus arisen in trying to reconcile religion with the precepts of contemporary scientific thinking, notably in such revolutionary fields as quantum physics and genetic engineering. This is not an easy task as religious teachings are coerced essentially with explaining even the most complex natural phenomena in apparently simple terms, while the general tendency in modern science is to perceive the world as basically complex, even 'chaotic'. Indeed, contemporary science is faced with the difficulty of finding patterns where none apparently exist, of drawing 'laws' and 'order' from 'chaos'. To apply this assumption to the field of social science is to identify war — and terrorism — with chaos, and to see peace as the ability to rise above such manifestations of chaos and achieve a state of 'order'.

Such an approach assumes that Huntington's theory of the 'clash of civilisations' should be rejected, because it departs from the premise that chaos is always bound to prevail. Fukuyama's 'end of history' theory, which is basically linear, should also be dismissed, for contradicting modern science's postulate of complexity and non-linearity. Actually, the task of putting an end to what we described as a 'critical threshold', that is, of overcoming bipolarity not only in words, but also in deeds, is likely to become the most formidable issue the world will have to face in the coming century.

From page to screen

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

I first worked in cinema in the mid-forties when Salah Abu Seif asked me to collaborate with him on the scenario for the film *Antar Wa Abila*. That collaboration was the beginning of an association with cinema that resulted in a large number of scripts as well as film adaptations of novels. Between the years 1952-1957 I actually abandoned novels, intending to devote my energies entirely to scriptwriting. Indeed, I went so far as to register myself at the syndicate as a script writer though suddenly I regained my interest in literature and dropped cinema work.

I have always considered the cinema an effective channel to reach those sections of the public that are unlikely to even open, let alone read, a book. As long as my book exists and can be read then I have no qualms at all about it being adapted for the screen. If the audience for a novel can be counted in the thousands, cinema audiences can be counted in millions, one effect of which is to make film work far more lucrative than slaving over a novel.

With adaptations of my novels I was often willing to accept changes, feeling that the novel existed as an entity and that the film was something else, though I know many authors have problems with such changes. I was also, through this process, able to meet a great many film directors and actors, many of whom I continue to hold in the highest regard.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

October: "The US has used the veto this week to obstruct the re-election of Boutros Ghali because he has an independent mind and refuses to obey American instructions. Thus the US has defied the will of the 14 other member states of the Security Council... Is this in itself not an indication that the US leadership will be a danger to the world?"
(Ragab El-Banna, 24 November)

Al-Shaah: "Boutros Ghali was not 100 per cent obedient to the US; the US administration is determined to make an example of him. Now the US can see clearly that the world order is actually multi-polar, since the European Community along with Russia, China and Japan, in addition to the multitude of smaller states in Asia, Africa and Latin America have all participated in the outcry against the US... The US must, therefore, retreat... Even in the event that the opposition accepts to withdraw the nomination of Boutros Ghali... whoever replaces Ghali will be a symbol of the new international balance, and will never be a 'yes' man to the US as it would wish him to be."
(Adel Hussein, 22 November)

Al-Gomhuriya: "Although the battle which Boutros Ghali is fighting today is a 'one-man' and an unequal battle... it is one of the greatest battles of our century. The tenacity exhibited by Ghali to his position is truly unprecedented... Whether Ghali remains in his position or is overpowered by the US — this will be a lesson for each and every one of his successors — a lesson about the respect and reverence owed to the office [of secretary-general], the organisation and its independence."
(Mahfouz, Al-Ansari, 19 November)

Al-Arabi: "The crisis involving Boutros Ghali is, in essence, the crisis of the international organisation in the post-cold war period... in addition to the US belief that the very existence of the UN is an impediment which restricts its free-handed management of international disputes. The flagrant US defiance of the will of the international community bent on the extension of Ghali's term of office, blackmailed the world, by a gambit whereby the UN is brought to the brink of an abyss: either it [the UN] identifies with US interests or is declared dead."
(Abdallah Al-Sinawi, 25 November)

Al-Ahram: "The world will not come to an end if Boutros Ghali is defeated in this unequal confrontation, or if it ends in a compromise... But it will never be a total loss... if the crisis ends in a reconsideration of the royal right to

Ghali's battle

veto, which is monopolised by five members, or if eyes open to see the degree of distortion in the balance of power in the consultation chambers within the Security Council, or if the world is forewarned of the total paralysis which would undermine the organisation's ability to move forward as it stands at the threshold of a new century."
(Assem Al-Qirsh, 24 November)

Al-Wafd: "The battle over Boutros Ghali will not be an easy one, but will have repercussions and consequences affecting the destiny of the international organisation, and the future of the world order peddled by the US to justify its control of the world... The battle will be settled once and for all only by the power of the democratic regimes throughout the world... The outcome of the race is commensurate with the force exercised by democracies."
(Gamal Badawi, 21 November)

Al-Akhbar: "America committed a grave mistake by stubbornly insisting on refusing the extension of Ghali's mandate. This attitude is the peak of stupidity since the US will gain nothing... rather it will open the door for other states to witness the truth which many of them had not believed, namely that despite its being the most powerful, the richest and the greatest, [the US] does not possess all the cards, and is not the one with the prerogative to speak while all the rest answer 'Amen'."
(Mahmoud Abdel-Moneim Mourad, 20 November)

Al-Ahram: "The possible manoeuvre for Ghali could be to refer the whole matter to the General Assembly, win its support, then, apologetically step down... which would show that the US, despite its power and influence, is internationally isolated... and [would show] its supporters' rejection of the dictation lessons which Washington insists on."
(Salah Montasser, 21 November)

Al-Ahali: "Egypt decided to push ahead with the battle for Ghali and not to withdraw even in the event of the US using the veto against him... While Egypt has marginalised Israel and relegated it to its normal status as a Middle Eastern state and not as half the Middle East, the diplomatic confrontation with the US will emphasise that it [the US] does not own the UN and does not have the right to rule the world."
(Ahmed Sayed Hassan, 22 November)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The late Abdel-Hadi Radi, minister of public works and water resources, passed away yesterday. His features were typically Egyptian, as was only appropriate for the person in charge of the waters of the River Nile. It was Radi, after all, who was responsible for the In-and Salam Canals.

Despite his serious illness, last week Radi had attended a conference of ministers from the Mediterranean basin — the last of many journeys as a representative of Egypt. He had hoped that Cairo would be chosen as the site of the headquarters of the International Institute for Water Resources, soon to be established.

مَكْرًا مِنَ الْأَصْلِ

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Intervention for whom

Quietly, and without any announcement or fanfare, four European countries — namely France, Italy, Spain and Portugal — have decided to establish a military force capable of intervening in the countries of the southern Mediterranean basin.

Without consulting any of their Mediterranean neighbours — the southern coast of the Mediterranean is deemed to include Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Egypt, in addition to Lebanon, Syria and, at a stretch, Jordan — the four countries went ahead with plans to form their military task force.

The aims and objectives of this force and the motivations that underwrite its formation remain unknown. We do not know under what circumstances military operations will be sanctioned, or by reference to which international conventions, laws or organisations such operations, which obviously involve direct interference in the internal affairs of other nations, will be legitimised.

The countries of the Maghreb were quick to voice their objections to the establishing of the force and to express concern at the intentions that lay behind such a move. Muammar El-Gaddafi, the Libyan president, sounded the strongest opposition, unsurprisingly so given that Libya is the country that appears most at risk from the intervention of this force.

The West's attitudes towards Libya are still clouded by the Lockerbie incident and the continued muddling of the waters caused by sanctions.

Gaddafi, in his objections, posited the possibility of establishing an Arab task force to counter the threat of possible European intervention south of the Mediterranean, though his suggestion has yet to take any concrete form.

Mediterranean Arab countries, indeed the Mediterranean region in general, have in recent years been the focus of any number of security and military projects. The recipes that purport to ensure the security of the region are constantly being adapted, cooked a little more, re-dressed and re-garnished. Countries are urged on, coaxed into joining security and defence pacts, tempted by the embrace of NATO, encouraged to join in cooperation schemes and peace keeping networks, all of which purport to have as their aim the maintenance of security within the region.

Strategic coalitions with European countries endlessly mutate, but always within the bounds of the Organisation of European Security and Cooperation.

Certainly there is a general feeling that it is in the best interest of Arab countries bordering the Mediterranean to strive to bolster economic, political and cultural cooperation with Europe, and to contribute to efforts aimed at securing regional stability.

Europeans have their own concerns with such agreements, however, and little, though, to enhance security. Rather, they excite suspicion. And the decision to form a European task force capable of quickly intervening beyond the southern shore of the Mediterranean is a case in point.

European countries have their own priorities and their own concepts of what constitutes security and stability in the Mediterranean. The priorities set by Arab countries in this domain have been clearly articulated, and are predicated on the necessity of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict fairly and comprehensively. So far Europe has displayed little appetite for achieving this goal.

Gomaa



Human rights for whom? Are there any human beings other than the Israelis

A vote against the veto

The actual outcome of the battle between Boutros-Ghali and the US matters little, writes Abdel-Moneim Said; the world community has already renewed the secretary-general's mandate

The Security Council's 14-to-1 vote last week made the world community's opinion of Boutros-Ghali eminently clear. The only opposition to a renewal of his mandate was the US's veto; otherwise, the verdict was that the secretary-general's mandate should be extended for a second term. This overwhelming majority showed that the arguments against his candidacy put by Washington and Ghali's other critics, including many in Egypt itself, are either fallacious or totally unconvincing to the vast majority of nations — including four major powers with veto rights. Even countries with a record of backing UN positions, like the UK, Chile and Japan, could not vote against an international consensus. The US and Ambassador Madeleine Albright were left completely isolated.

The Security Council vote was the first serious round of confrontations between the US and the secretary-general. Whether or not Boutros-Ghali had won, these events have independent historical value in demarcating international relations and loyalties to the post-Cold War era, and the place the UN and the US will occupy. The conventional wisdom that the US, as the sole remaining superpower, is also the only global mover and shaker, will have been tested. The democratic nature of the UN will have been placed under international scrutiny, and its credibility as an organisation which accurately reflects world opinion will have been contested. But no matter what the outcome, Boutros-Ghali is still the victor of these battles. Re-elected, he was the champion of democracy and the symbol of global cooperation in redefining the troubled state of international affairs for the coming century. Defeated, he was the last hero of the twentieth century, like Gary Cooper in High Noon, making a desperately courageous last stand against the omnipotent superpower.

The story of Ghali's confrontation with Washington started last June when the State Department leaked to *The New York Times* that the administration would not support Boutros-Ghali's re-election. This tidbit did not come as a complete surprise: it was obvious at the time that the extreme right in the US had succeeded in creating an anti-UN campaign which set up the secretary-general as the main target. It seemed then that an interest in outmanoeuvring Dole and the Republicans animated the entire exercise. What was a surprise, on the other hand, was the extent to which the US administration, in violation of all precedents, was prepared to make its opinions public, consulting neither its own allies, nor, a fortiori, the rest of the world community. In a way, the US was violating all the tenets of post-Cold War diplomacy, heretofore based on quiet back-room consultations.

What began as an election ploy in the United States was soon to reveal, first, the US's failure to present reasonable, solid grounds for its position, and secondly, its complete refusal to participate in a democratic process. Initially, the US delegation raised the flag of UN reform. Ghali, it was said, had failed to make the necessary administrative, organisational and financial reforms aimed at streamlining the world organisation and maximising its efficiency. But this claim was soon revealed as the hollow pretext it really was: the largest expansion ever of UN peace-keeping operations (17 military interventions involving a total of 70,000 soldiers), as well as the addition of 20 states to the list of members, took place with no increase in the budget; the number of specialised offices in the General Secretariat was slashed from 20 to 12, 11 of the secretary-general's 48 assistants were dispensed with, and 1,000 positions in the organisation were cancelled, thus re-

ducing the number of employees by 20 per cent. Close scrutiny reveals that Boutros-Ghali's record in reforming the UN bureaucracy is unparalleled. Not to mention that the call for reform was made by a country which categorically and continually refuses to pay the \$1.4 billion it owes the UN.

But the US soon came up with another reason for wanting Boutros-Ghali out: the UN's failure to deal with the crises in Somalia and Bosnia. Again, a close look at the facts shows that this argument does not hold water either. It was the US that lost its nerve and withdrew unilaterally from Somalia, leaving the remaining UN forces in serious jeopardy. In Bosnia, the US and other major powers were unable to get their act together and dragged their heels in implementing the secretary-general's repeated calls to deploy troops in an attempt to enforce the Dayton agreement. The controversy over Somalia and Bosnia, in fact, soon brought to light the secretary-general's success in managing over 42 world conflicts through preventive diplomacy, mediation, relief work, and peace-keeping operations. Boutros-Ghali worked to resolve conflicts regardless of strategic importance, or the participants' race or religion. For him, no war in Africa or central Asia should be forgotten or ignored: any suffering was a threat to world security.

Strike two: having failed to tarnish Boutros-Ghali's record in conflict management and resolution, the US looked to the future. Washington argued that the UN really needed a new secretary-general who could carry it forward into the twenty-first century. Again, the US's argument was fallacious. No other secretary-general in UN history has matched Boutros-Ghali's efforts to develop a global agenda for the future. He was not only responsible for seeing the UN into the un-

Soapbox

Towards a coalition

As the policies of Netanyahu continue unchecked and Israel lurches from one international or domestic crisis to another, the possibility of a coalition government between the Likud and Labour parties, comes to appear increasingly likely.

Netanyahu, elected in an atmosphere thick with fear, sought to pacify his electorate by promising both peace and security. Since his election, however, he has failed to deliver either. Single-handedly he has halted the peace process while at the same time Israel has seen an increase in violence and a rising death toll among both Israelis and Palestinians.

Meanwhile, the Israeli economy has entered the doldrums and the benefits that accrued after signing the Oslo Accords are now threatened. Israel's financial community is sufficiently alarmed by the policies of the prime minister to have itself issued calls for a coalition government, one capable of ensuring that peace, and its expected dividends, are placed squarely at the top of the Israeli political agenda.

Should the situation continue to deteriorate Netanyahu could all too easily find himself in a position where he has no choice but to invite Labour into a coalition. Certainly such a move might alleviate the increasingly unsympathetic way in which his government is viewed internationally.

One possible coalition scenario would be for Peres to be placed in charge of the peace process, possibly as minister of foreign affairs. Netanyahu may himself be uncomfortable with such an arrangement, but as his policies force the region ever closer to the brink of disaster and the threat of yet more outbreaks of violence grows stronger, he may well find that he has no choice. First, though, he will have to come to terms with the complete failure of his administration to deliver its earlier promises.

This week's Soapbox writer is expert at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies and chief editor of its weekly Israeli Digest.



Abdel-Alim Mohamed

Redefining regional cooperation

MENA III moved economic negotiations into a new phase, writes Raouf Saad, bringing links between the region and global economic groupings into the foreground

The third Middle East and North Africa Conference (MENA III) was hosted by the Egyptian government, co-organised by the World Economic Forum in Cairo, and co-sponsored by the United States and the Russian Federation. The 21 countries participating were represented by 5,000 governments, private sector firms and media participants. It may still be too early to fully assess the outcome of this conference, but it is not premature to give some preliminary ideas of achievements from the Egyptian perspective.

The Cairo conference is the third of a series of conferences for the MENA region, the first of which was held in Casablanca (Morocco) in 1994, and the second was held in Amman (Jordan) in 1995. The Cairo conference, however, convened in a considerably different political and economic setting that contributed to giving it a totally new outlook.

Whereas the Casablanca and Amman conferences were held in the aftermath of breakthroughs in political negotiations between Israel, on one hand, and the PLO and Jordan, on the other, followed by promising signs regarding the negotiations with Syria, the Cairo conference was held at a time when the peace process was under severe strain, since the very principles which had guided the process since Madrid were being put in question.

While the three conferences were held in quite similar global economic conditions — which may be summed up as the globalisation of all levels of economic activity and the increased importance of international private investments in promoting economic growth all over the world — the Cairo conference came at a time when the MENA region's awareness of the nature and implica-

tions of these conditions had reached a new level. The success of many MENA countries in reforming their economies in an attempt to deal with the new conditions, and to benefit from the opportunities they offer, has become more obvious to the international community.

Most importantly for the topic at hand, the Cairo conference came at a turning point on the path of economic transformation and reform in Egypt. After long years spent rebuilding the infrastructure and stabilising the macro-economic framework, Egypt has entered a new phase in its economic reform and structural adjustment programme, which focuses on reforming the regulatory framework, privatisation, deepening structural adjustment, and liberalising international trade. The first signs of success of this new phase are becoming apparent and point to the beginning of a real take-off in the economy, reflected in evolving economic indicators, including the increase of the rate of growth to 4.6 per cent this year. It is anticipated that this rate will increase to 7-8 per cent by 2000. The support given by the IMF to the third phase of the economic reform programme, the fact that Egypt was exempted from paying the third tranche of its external debt, and the expansion and activity in the emerging Egyptian stock market during recent months are all testimony of the success of this new phase of the reform process.

Egypt's awareness of these conditions and their significance shaped this year's conference. The conference was convened on time, but was organised with a view to achieving basic objectives that are consistent with Egypt's foreign policy — specifically, supporting the peace process in the region, re-

defining the concept of regional cooperation, enhancing Egypt's position to the region, and promoting growth and investment, particularly in Egypt. The preliminary assessment of the conference points to success on all these points.

The Cairo Declaration, the joint message issued at the end of the conference, was accepted by all the members of its steering committee. This declaration, as well as the overall thrust of the speeches of the conference, conveyed a strong message of support for peace in the region. The participants of the conference expressed their unwavering commitment to the achievement of a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, on the basis of the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, established by the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. The Declaration also underlined the paramount importance of implementing existing agreements between the parties, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian track, and renewed the parties' commitment to peace and further progress in outstanding issues on all the negotiating tracks of the peace process. Egypt, therefore, made it possible for the conference and the declaration to focus the world community's message on support for comprehensive peace to the region on the basis of internationally accepted principles and existing agreements. This clear, targeted message will hopefully contribute to bringing the peace process onto the right track.

Equally important, the Declaration emphasised the link between progress in regional cooperation and progress in the peace process, reflecting the Egyptian point of view that only a full, comprehensive peace in the region can allow all parties to reap the

benefits of regional cooperation. Indeed, the unanimous message was that one cannot be separated from the other: that no party can enjoy the economic benefits of peace and cooperation unless steps are taken toward a just and comprehensive peace. This message was made eminently clear by representatives of the business community, who are no doubt the best placed to convey this message to the public, including Israeli public opinion.

The Cairo Declaration made it clear that the development of the Palestinian economy was important for the whole region, and expressed concern regarding the negative impact on potential development of the closures and restrictions to which the Palestinians are subjected. It also highlighted the need to remove these restrictions, to improve the economic performance of the Palestinian economy, but also to improve the political atmosphere surrounding the peace process as a whole.

Egypt was able to redefine the concept of regional cooperation underlying the MENA conferences. Regional cooperation at this conference was redefined to cover all forms of regional cooperation, including or excluding Israel. According to this concept, Arab cooperation, to which an independent session was devoted for the first time, was presented as a demonstration of regional cooperation. But all forms of cooperation between the countries of the region were given due attention. The agreement to export natural gas to Turkey is another facet of this redefinition. Regional cooperation was also placed in a wider context, by highlighting the link between the region and international global economic groupings, particularly the European Union through the Euro-

Mediterranean framework, to which a separate session was dedicated. In short, the conference has become a forum for dialogue and cooperation among equal parties.

Perhaps the most important achievement of the conference, from the Egyptian point of view, lies in the outstanding success of all the Egyptian participants, starting with President Mubarak in the inaugural session and including the prime minister, the ministers, government officials, and businessmen, in presenting Egypt's new economic vision, economic reform policies, economic achievements, vast projects and available investment opportunities. This vision was endorsed and echoed by officials from several countries and international organisations. The conference witnessed the beginning of a new phase in Egypt's economic transformation: it is capable of attracting the private investments that will accelerate its economic growth, create jobs for its work force, and allow its population to build a better future. Indeed, that was the essence of the declaration made by President Mubarak: "This year, Egypt has joined the global economy. It will abide by its rules and it will share in its prosperity."

The economic agreements and deals initiated, negotiated or signed during the conference may be only the tip of the iceberg. For these goals to be effectively pursued a lot of hard work on all levels is necessary. The measures already decided by the Egyptian Cabinet are an indication of the amount of work necessary, but also a sign of the government's commitment and will to meet the challenge.

The writer is deputy assistant foreign minister for regional economic cooperation.

To The Editor

One-Agora justice

Sir - The lamented piastre has ceased to exist. Shopkeepers in Egypt have long been accustomed to giving their customers change in the form of candy, matches, or mints. It seems that in Israel, where the Agora (one-hundredth of a shekel) has also disappeared, the change will be given in the form of a licence to kill a few Palestinians. An Israeli military court has made that possible.

The court, if it can be called that, fined four Is-

raeli soldiers one Agora for killing an 18-year-old Palestinian in the West Bank. In order not to be accused of taking human life, albeit the life of a Goy, too lightly, it also sentenced the soldiers to one hour of imprisonment (suspended).

Some human rights advocates, both Israeli and Palestinian, expressed their indignation and protested the ridiculous sentence. In a rare display of the transparency needed to sustain true democracy, the army refused to comment on or to provide a copy of the court's judgement and sentence. The military prosecutor-general vowed to

appeal the sentence for its extreme leniency. As in many cases before this one, when Israeli soldiers got off lightly for the cold-blooded murder of unarmed Palestinians, there are no grounds for hoping that this is going to be any different. The dust will settle. The indignant cries will die down and nothing will change. It will simply be added to the long list of Israeli *faits accomplis* with which "the Arabs will have to learn to live."

To the thunderous applause of a joint session of the US Congress, Mr Netanyahu declared that

Israel was going to teach its Arab neighbours the values of democracy and human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the right to life is the supreme right from which all others flow. With such a practical demonstration of Israel's respect for human rights and democratic values, Arab countries can justifiably say: "No thank you. This is a lesson we can do without."

Peace is usually established when parties to a conflict suddenly realise that the "other" does exist: that everybody's pain is equally painful

and everybody's life is equally precious. It takes a great deal of courage to accept the equal humanity of the "other". One wonders what kind of peace can be achieved between those who believe that the life of the other is worth one Agora, one third of a cent, to be paid by four murderers (who were found guilty — otherwise the so-called court would not have fined them), and those who are willing to die just to disprove this misguided racist notion?

Enssam Ahmed
New York

Buddha in a junkyard

Funny how all tramps look alike whatever their nationality. Pinter's Davies, who currently trends the boards of the National's main hall from six to eight every evening is no exception, however much he struts and frets. If you take a ramble through Ataba Square at night you will tumble upon his like, lurking in the shadows of the arcade facing the theatre or huddled in the narrow pitted passage way that separates it from the ghostly remains of what were once the Bekkiya Gardens. I can imagine director Mohamed Abdel-Hadi running into one of them upon his return to Cairo after many years in Europe and rushing into the old prestigious theatre to announce to its manager, Hoda Wafsi, that he has finally hit upon just the right play for his come-back production: Pinter's *The Caretaker*.

Of course, tramps have always fascinated artists, and may be they are, in the final analysis, kindred spirits. Sophocles's Oedipus ended up a tramp, and so did Shakespeare's Lear, and both Chaplin and Beckett have immortalised the figure, the one making him a prototype of modern man and the other a metaphor for the human condition. Pinter's tramp is likewise a postmodern metaphor and a brilliantly comic creation; but he is also an intensely real figure, with very real faults, fears and obsessions. He may be the archetypal lost father, Adam coping with his sons after the fall or Gloucester coping with his in *King Lear*, or even a Buddha fallen on hard times (as Pinter goes to great lengths to suggest); but above and beyond all this he is a very convincing lifeless creature. He is weak, old, helpless and pathetic, but also spiteful, cringing, boastful, mendacious and xenophobic. Out on the streets, in the open air, the natural habitat of all tramps, he would be just another harmless tramp, obsessed with the weather and the need for good shoes to carry him along. But Pinter, who is equally obsessed with rooms (as appears from a conversation with Richard Findlater, published in *The Twentieth Century* in February 1961), and whose first play was significantly called *The Room*, decides to drag him indoors, in to the private territory of two brothers, Mick and Aston, high-spirited petty businessmen who own a big, derelict house and a van and seem to have resented his father, and Aston, who was once dreamy and loquacious, but has become inarticulate and slow-witted after forcibly undergoing electric-shock treatment with the approval of his mother whom he feels has betrayed him. Once inside, the tramp becomes a potential guest and victim; and the drama is spun out of the tensions and oscillations between these possibilities and the constantly shifting balance of power between the characters.

For Pinter, it is enough to put two or three characters in a room with a few sticks of furniture and start them talking and, *voilà*, you have a play; he has no need of plot and no use for intrigue. The action is born out of the tension between the spoken and unspoken, in

Nehad Selaiha finds little menace but a lot of zing in the National's production of Pinter's *The Caretaker*



those gaps of silence and the areas of hesitancy and indeterminacy. It is this, together with the seemingly rambling dialogue with its inconsequential shifts, abrupt stops and transitions and many disconcerting digressions which make Pinter's plays, despite their naturalistic moodings, so elusive and so difficult to render effectively on the stage in a different language.

Pinter transposed to a different linguistic medium and culture will inevitably be a different Pinter, and paradoxically, it is only by acknowledging this fact and acquiescing in it that a translator or director can hope to capture, in a large measure, the authentic mood of the plays, their humour, poetry and emotional complexity. It is useless to try to ape in classical Arabic the subtle rhythms of ordinary English conversation which Pinter capitalises on and often parodies, or to try to reproduce in the acting style the natural reserve of the British; to feel authentic, both the language and the meaning should be the natural temperaments of the speakers of the language. An earlier

successful production of Pinter's *Old Times* at Al-Hanager this year has proved the wisdom of using an educated version of the Egyptian vernacular in the translation, and in the case of the current production of *The Caretaker*, translator Abdel-Halim El-Bashlawi steered a middle course between classical and colloquial Arabic and his policy paid high dividends. The actors are at ease with the words and characters and were able to exploit the rich tonal resources of ordinary everyday language. Sami Abdel-Halim's Davies was Pinter's tramp all right, but touched up with many vivid local colours; he spoke of going to Sidcup and of the rain that would not let up and was convincing; but you could equally imagine him knocking around the maze of alleys that surround Ataba Square. To his fidgety, excitable, restless Davies, Kamal Suliman contrasted a gentle, sensitive Aston, shy and lonely; his movement, alternately stiff, jerky and fumbling, was strangely moving, betraying a depth of sorrow under the cool, subdued surface. Zein Nassar as

the aggressive Mick opted for a loud, violent, openly theatrical style of acting which, at its most frenzied, suggested a somewhat deranged character with hallucinations of grandeur. In a British production this style would seem overdone and would perhaps shatter the fabric of the play; I am not even sure that this interpretation of the part tallies with what Pinter had in mind. Egyptian productions, however, are made of tougher fabrics, and the current production sustained the violent gymnastics of Nassar without breaking. Hopefully, in time, he will tone down his lurid performance with the performances of the two other members of the trio.

On the whole, the production stuck faithfully to the text and designer Mohamed Hashim allowed himself, as far as possible, to be guided by Pinter's stage-directions regarding the set and costumes. The set was duly cluttered with old junk, as Pinter instructed, but the statue of Buddha was enlarged and placed on a high shelf at the top, with a constant spotlight on it, obviously for the benefit of the unperceptive members of the audience, and the walls of the room were made to look as if they were made of thin planks of wood, with obvious cracks in between through which the light seeps from outside. This made the room look curiously like Aston's intended shed, which he dreams of building, and had the effect of permeating the whole scene with a sense of pathetic fragility. In comparison the big, white statue of Buddha, hunched up, looked solidly god-like and immovable, suggesting permanence and serenity. This suggests a different interpretation of the meaning of the statue, particularly since the director omits the highly significant moment near the close of the play when Mick hurls the statue at the tramp and breaks it as a sign of the final rejection of the father-figure. In the production, the rejection remains verbal in the case of the two brothers.

In the interest of brevity, Abdel-Hadi divided the play into two parts instead of three acts, ending the first part after Aston's proposal to Davies that he stay on and become caretaker. Consequently, the second part opens with the second brother, Mick, making the same proposition to the same person which serves to highlight the symmetrical structure of the play, with its parallels and contrasts, and to underline the need of both sons for a caretaker. It is also to Abdel-Hadi's credit that he kept Pinter's quiet, inconclusive ending even though it caused some frustration and bewilderment among the audience. In the absence of a curtain (the National does not use one) many took the final blackout for a scene shift and did not believe the play had ended. Only the appearance of the actors to take their bows convinced them. I left the theatre thoroughly satisfied but I could not understand why I suddenly remembered the old nursery rhyme "It's raining, it's pouring, the old man's snoring" nor why I kept looking around for tramps.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Elizabeth Bondles-Abdallah
Spiral Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily 10am-12.30pm & 3pm-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Under the title "Between Reality and Fantasy", the Hungarian artist displays paintings with an Egyptian flavour.

The 7th Student Art Exhibition
Ezra Gallery, Main Campus, AUC. El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 337 3436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 28 Nov.

Children's Drawings
Cairo Opera House, Opera House Grounds. Tel 342 0339. Daily 10am-10pm. 30 Nov.

Abdel-Wahab Morsi (Paintings)
Ezra Gallery, 3 El-Nasr St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Tramplon L'Oeil
Islamic Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Morshedy St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Abu Bakr El-Nawawi (Drawings)
Spiral Arts Gallery, 36/4 Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Adly Kattallah (Watercolours)
Ezra Gallery, 4 Ameria El-Ladina St. Garden City. Tel 334 7951. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 7 Dec.

Sayed Amin Fayad (Paintings)
Shomon's Gallery, 12 Rd 130, El-Horriya St. Maadi. Tel 350 0681. Daily 10am-7pm. 30 Nov-7 Dec.

Farruk Hani
Ezra Gallery, 3 El-Nasr St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Assem Sharaf (Paintings)
Shomon's Gallery, 12 Rd 130, El-Horriya St. Maadi. Tel 350 0681. Daily 10am-7pm. 30 Nov-7 Dec.

Louis Tawfik (Drawings)
Goshen Institute, 3 Abdel-Salam St. Downtown. Tel 373 9777. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Wageeh Walaha
Mashrouk Gallery, 8 Champs-Élysées St. off Tahrir St. Tel 373 9777. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

The Portrait Photography of Van Lee
Spiral Arts Gallery, 36/4 Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Barry Iversen (Photography)
Goshen Institute, 3 Abdel-Salam St. Downtown. Tel 373 9777. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Animals in Egyptian Art
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan St. and El-Morshedy St. Downtown. Tel 337 3436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Art Fair
Donda Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St. across Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil St. Tel 337 3436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kofor El-Akhal St. Dokki. Tel 337 3436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir St. Downtown. Tel 373 4319. Daily 10am-5pm. 30 Nov-31 Dec.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily 10am-5pm. 30 Nov-31 Dec.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St. Ahmed Maher St. Tel 337 3436. Daily 10am-5pm. 30 Nov-31 Dec.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Garden City. Tel 342 0339. Daily 10am-5pm. 30 Nov-31 Dec.

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Guindi St. Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of the Mohamed Naghi (1888-1956), the Alexandrian artist who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St. Giza. Daily 10am-5pm. 30 Nov-31 Dec.

Children's Drawings
Cairo Opera House, Opera House Grounds. Tel 342 0339. Daily 10am-10pm. 30 Nov.

Abdel-Wahab Morsi (Paintings)
Ezra Gallery, 3 El-Nasr St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Tramplon L'Oeil
Islamic Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Morshedy St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Abu Bakr El-Nawawi (Drawings)
Spiral Arts Gallery, 36/4 Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 Nov.

Adly Kattallah (Watercolours)
Ezra Gallery, 4 Ameria El-Ladina St. Garden City. Tel 334 7951. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 7 Dec.

Sayed Amin Fayad (Paintings)
Shomon's Gallery, 12 Rd 130, El-Horriya St. Maadi. Tel 350 0681. Daily 10am-7pm. 30 Nov-7 Dec.

Farruk Hani
Ezra Gallery, 3 El-Nasr St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Assem Sharaf (Paintings)
Shomon's Gallery, 12 Rd 130, El-Horriya St. Maadi. Tel 350 0681. Daily 10am-7pm. 30 Nov-7 Dec.

Louis Tawfik (Drawings)
Goshen Institute, 3 Abdel-Salam St. Downtown. Tel 373 9777. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Wageeh Walaha
Mashrouk Gallery, 8 Champs-Élysées St. off Tahrir St. Tel 373 9777. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

The Portrait Photography of Van Lee
Spiral Arts Gallery, 36/4 Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

Barry Iversen (Photography)
Goshen Institute, 3 Abdel-Salam St. Downtown. Tel 373 9777. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 12 Dec.

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Twelve Months
Al-Salam Theatre, El-Nasr St. Tel 341 2926. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. 30 Nov-31 Dec.

Mission Impossible
MGW, Maadi Grand Mall, Kollat El-Nasr St. Maadi. Tel 332 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Egyptian Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Giza. Tel 341 2926. 28 Nov, 8pm.

Les Mariannes Lupa-Turino
Gomkoury Theatre, Gomkoury St. Tel 341 2926. 28 Nov, 9pm; 29 Nov, 3pm; 30 Nov, 11am.

Art Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Giza. Tel 341 2926. 28 Nov, 8pm.

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Music

Pearls and flying fish

David Blake
trips here, there and everywhere

George Bizet: The Pearl Fishers; Cairo Opera Orchestra; conductor Alain Marguin; Cairo Opera House Main Hall, 21 November

Last year's production of this youthful work of Bizet was so well groomed that it ended up as oratorio and not opera. This year's revised version is more vitaminised and theatrical. The renovated first act opened with a bedraggled and carelessly overture, then continued into loose ends and frayed edges. We seemed set for the worst as each of the principal actors strove to assert themselves to make plausible characters out of the stilted prototypes that pass for people in this libretto.

Then came Act 2. All was changed — suffused in romantically lit Singhalese landscapes by Alan El-Din Mustafa with sets and costumes by Jean-Pierre Berli. The two brothers, Michel Archimbaud and Pascale Balin-Rossi, have re-arranged the moves and attitudes of the singers so that even the chorus was humanised. And there was life-giving speed to the dramatic confrontation as the libretto proceeded with the story. We were watching fisher folk, not costume dummies.

The plot, wild lawless pearl-divers, golden token necklaces lost and found, pearls, jealousy and the usual wandering virgin priestess who in opera is usually the object on which hangs the story. Bizet drapes his erotic, highly centred music around these stereotypes. As Act 2 began, things were set for a quite exceptionally enjoyable show.

Lelia, the lapsed priestess, was soprano Mona Rafia, fully recovered from last year's nerves, looking beautifully tall,

and Seven Gates — a poem that draws on the writer's own experiences of detention in Iraq and subsequent exile. *An Allegory and Seven Gates* comes from Saadi Youssef's collection *Muhawalaat* (Attempts), first published in 1990 by Dar El-Adaab in Beirut

To thrive, an audience is needed, an audience that feels it is being neither patronised, alienated or what is worse, insulted. Our galleries, like theatres and cinemas, should be crowded, and exhibitions be an expres-

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بالتقريب

Mursi Saad El-Din

Celebrating childhood

Children from 27 governorates converged on Tanta to participate in the National Children's Conference for the first time. Rania Khallaf attended



The delegates to last week's conference in Tanta were easily spotted — they were the shortest people in the room. For the first time, children were given a full chance to discuss their very own concerns: children's rights, radio and television programmes, school curricula and protection of the environment. But the three-day conference, held under Mrs Suzanne Mubarak's auspices, was only one event among Egypt's celebrations of Children's Day which will continue this week. Amina El-Gundi, secretary-general of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, said that the aim of the conference was to develop children's effective participation, creativity and negotiating skills.

Mrs Mubarak said the conference was a step towards teaching children decision-making and participation in democratic dialogue. In her closing speech, the First Lady also remarked that the conference had demonstrated children's faith in their country and their future as well. Conference discussions focused mainly on the necessity of applying the terms of the International Convention of Children's Rights.

The conference recommended that the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood undertake the responsibility of applying the Children's Pact, which earmarked the decade 1989-1999 for the protection of Egyptian children, and that it guarantee the adherence of all governmental organisations to the pact's terms. The conference also recommended that efforts be made to curtail child labour.

International organisations for children and women have praised Mrs Mubarak's pioneering efforts, thanks to which Egypt has now embarked on plans to apply the International Convention for Children's Rights.

What about the children? Well, they had very



Mrs Suzanne Mubarak received the highest award of the World Book Institution for her valuable contribution to Egyptian children's cultural activities. Top: Mrs Mubarak at the Children's Book Fair; left: receiving the award; right: at the children's conference with Maher El-Gundi governor of El-Gharbiya

specific wish-lists: more space for sports activities in schools, special classes on protecting the environment and promoting environmental awareness.

Last week, Mrs Mubarak visited Media City, where she inaugurated the information centre and the Suzanne Mubarak Library, which houses over 6,000 books.

Mrs Mubarak also inaugurated the 13th Children's Book Fair this week. This year, 33 coun-

tries, represented by 320 publishers, have joined in, with Zimbabwe, Poland and Cuba participating for the first time. Exhibitions of children's drawings, theatre and cinema shows are all part of the festivities. Mrs Mubarak distributed prizes in literature and art. Included on the agenda of debates are new printing technologies for children's books, and the impact of popular art on the personality of children. And speaking of prizes, the First Lady herself received the Presidential Award, the high-

est honour granted by the World Book Institution. It is the first time since 1917 that this award has been presented to an international figure, said the chairman of the institution, who praised Mrs Mubarak for her successful promotion of children's cultural activities. These achievements include projects for developing children's skills, the establishment of children's libraries and the Children's Museum, Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni said in his address.

Cairo's sound and fury

ALTHOUGH Cairo ranks high among the world's worst noise-polluted cities, authorities appear to be turning a deaf ear to the problem, writes Hanaa Sabra, who claims that her ears yearn to hear the rustle of leaves for a change.

The banging of cars, the roar of motor-cycles and the blare of loudspeakers, sometimes in the middle of the night, all make Cairo one of the worst noise-polluted cities worldwide. And yet authorities, citing a law that gave violators a lengthy grace period, do not appear to be in a hurry to restore any degree of calm.

Field studies show that the noise level in downtown Ataba Square amounts to a staggering 82 decibels, although the maximum permitted by a 1994 law is 55 decibels during the day. Other public places, such as downtown's El-Tahrir and Heliopolis's Romy squares, also went above the permissible maximum, registering 58 decibels.

And yet the same law, which was published in January 1995, gave offenders a three-year grace period, ending in January 1998, to conform. Abdel-Latif Hafez, of the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency (EEAA), said that all the agency can do is ascertain reports and complaints of noise pollution and issue warnings to offenders. "But we cannot take firm ac-

tion because offenders have this grace period to adjust their conditions," he said. "After the end of this grace period, violating institutions will be shut down."

The Shubra El-Kheikh amusement park, located in El-Nozha El-Gadida, near Cairo Airport, is a case in point. The residents of neighbouring buildings complained to the EEAA that the night club is shattered by music blaring from Shubra's loudspeakers as well as noise coming from its electronic games.

Dr Mawahib Abdul-Aziz, director of the Central Cairo Centre (CCC) for Environmental Monitoring, reported that as soon as the complaint was received, officials from the CCC and the EEAA visited the amusement park, measured the noise level, said to average 75 decibels, and established that it violated the permissible maximum. All they could do, however, was issue the owners with a warning that they faced shutting down, after the expiration of the grace period, if they did not correct the situation.

Ahmed Mousa, a chemical engineer who lives near the amusement park, said: "We cannot sleep or relax because of the loudspeakers, the noisy parties that are held every night and the noise coming from the electronic games. Our children cannot study, babies scream all the time and elderly people suffer."

Another neighbour, Sherif Mahmoud, an accountant, said: "We seem to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown."

The complaints were rejected by Amr Heikal, Shubra's executive director. He said the amusement park was established in an empty area at the beginning of 1986. "There were no buildings around at the time. But now the place has changed into a residential area. This is not our fault but the result of poor planning by the government. And yet they blame us for the noise." He made it clear, however, the park will abide by the law before the expiration of the grace period.

The EEAA's Hafez explained that the sources of noise are either industrial or environmental. "Noise coming from industrial sources, mainly factories or workshops located near inhabited areas, can be controlled by organising the working hours to suit the neighbours or providing the factories with sound-proof walls," Hafez said.

"More serious," he added, "are the environmental sources of noise pollution, which are due to the people's bad habits." He cited young people turning up the volume of their car or home stereos, motorists honking their car horns for no valid reason, people using loudspeakers in celebration or mourning as well as noise coming from schools, cafeterias and

other commercial activities.

Dr Adel Sadek, a professor of psychiatry, warned of the damaging effect noise has on the nervous system. "There is a direct relationship between noise and psychological illness," he said. "Noise causes a sort of stimulation or excitation to certain parts of the brain responsible for attention and alertness, making a person over-sensitive or over-alert. This causes anxiety, tension, insomnia, irritability and nervousness and leads to aggression which we are evidently suffering from."

The effect of noise does not stop at psychological illness. It also causes physical disorders. Dr Mahmoud Amr, a professor of occupational and environmental medicine, said noise could cause damage to the brain and the ear cells, particularly in children and the elderly. Noise could also produce symptoms of exhaustion, fatigue, weakness and cause problems in the digestive system, leading to a peptic ulcer, and in the circulatory system, such as hypertension and cardiac disease.

"We need a noise map to determine the places worst affected by noise pollution and set priorities," said Amr.

This target might well be achieved while the nation awaits the expiration of the grace period.

Fayza Hassan

Supra Dayma

Hareesa

Ingredients:
1 kg semolina flour
300 gms sugar
1 litre whole milk
150 gms shredded coconut (dry)
3 tbsp tahina (sesame paste)
1 packet baking powder
Skinned almonds for decoration
Syrup

Method:
Prepare the syrup by mixing 2 cups sugar with 2 cups water and the juice of one lemon. Bring to a boil until the mixture thickens, then remove from heat and allow to cool. In a mixing bowl, add the sugar to the milk and stir to dissolve it. Gradually add the semolina flour whilst stirring, then add the baking powder and stir. Finally add the coconut and stir mixing all ingredients well together. Coat a round baking pan (14 inches in diameter) with the tahina then pour in the mixture and distribute it evenly. With a tip of a knife, make squares and place an almond on each one, then bake in a moderate preheated oven for about half an hour until golden. Remove from the oven and immediately pour the sweet syrup gradually over the hareesa, distributing it evenly. Cut into squares by running a knife over the lines marked out before baking.

Leave to rest and serve at room temperature.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

A menu in disguise

Nigel Ryan on mysteries worth solving

There is no question of what you should order at La Sirena. The decor all points to one thing, from the shoals of pottery angelfish attached to the wall to the golden scaled sea creatures in the stained glass windows. La Sirena's interior screams it out: Order fish. There are other things on the menu, but it would be childish, particularly in a review, to order anything other than that which the restaurant so assiduously promotes, which brings me to a slight problem.

La Sirena's menu is far from being a model of clarity. True, it is a fish restaurant, and so it does not take much detective work to deduce that "Lapere Cream Soup" is in fact lobster soup. But things can be more complicated. "Mediterranean sea shells with wine, greek and herbs" is perhaps the least confusing of the dishes listed as starters, but when you get to the main courses things begin to sound more peculiar and items such as "Seabass fillet according to cally, biak with shrimp and lapere" make a bewildering appearance.

Please don't get me wrong. My intention is not to gripe about less than perfect spelling or grammar — to do so in a newspaper article would in any case be a little foolhardy since god's law dictates that there is bound to be a howler, most probably in the headline. Difficulties only arise when it becomes impossible to understand the menu at all, which unfortunately is the case at La Sirena. And this is a great pity, because the quality of the food is obscured by its sloppy listing.

"Mediterranean seabass with wine, greek and herbs" are in fact clams, cooked with onion and a little garlic in a wine and butter

sauce. Tiny clams, wonderfully juicy and marvellously messy things to eat, are something I can heartily recommend. We also ordered "Seabass fillet according to cally, biak with shrimp and lapere" and the much more lucid "Seabass fillet with shrimp and lemon butter sauce". Which brings me to another slight problem.

Given the inability to standardise the menu, it is only to be expected that the items on that menu should undergo their own transformations. Lemons were apparently in short supply, and so the latter dish arrived with the same lobster and shrimp sauce as the seabass "according to cally". Enormous prawns, heads removed, wrapped in fillets of sea bass, served with a reduced lobster sauce and a little rice. Extraordinarily good value for what is really excellent food. A little rich, it is true, but the cold season is here and a little self-indulgence cannot do that much harm. Cally's own seabass was served with similarly enormous prawns but had been baked as a single fillet rather than being wrapped around the shellfish. It too was good.

The lobster soup which one of the party ordered was also fine. And La Sirena is excellent value. Three people ate well for LE160, which also included drinks. The service was excellent and the restaurant, though small, was comfortable enough to encourage lingering. A pleasant meal, good food and excellent value. Easily worth the trip to Heliopolis and the effort of breaking the code.

La Sirena, 113 Othman Ibn Affan, off Midan Triumph, Heliopolis.

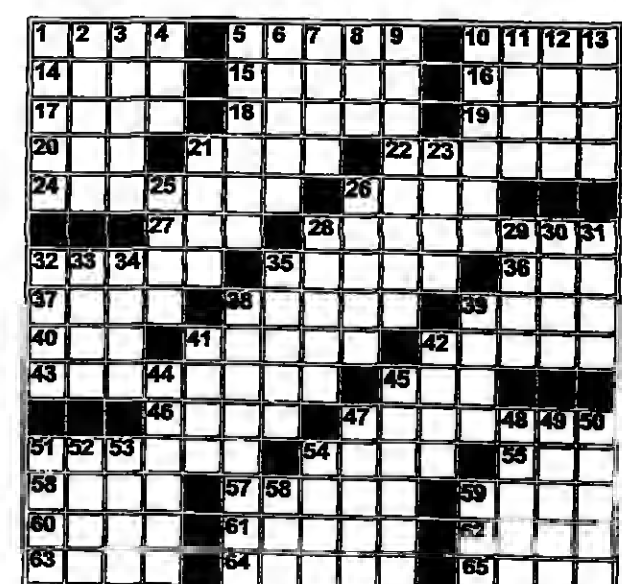
Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

- Across**
1. Farm building (4)
 2. Full; haul (5)
 3. Castle defence (4)
 4. Murs (4)
 5. Open sore (5)
 6. Futile; inactive (4)
 7. Osculate (4)
 8. Frithy maxim (5)
 9. Arab port (4)
 10. Superlative suffix (3)
 11. Exp. of surprise (4)
 12. Threw (6)
 13. Dregs (7)
 14. Compact; company (4)
 15. Dung-beetle (2)
 16. Orates (6)
 17. Furnishing of room (5)
 18. Bristles (5)
 19. Female rabbit (3)
 20. Elliptical (4)
 21. Board; jury (5)
 22. Inert gas (4)
 23. Tear (3)
 24. Bind for roasting (5)
 25. False god (4)

- Down**
1. Bread maker (5)
 2. Soar; ascend (5)
 3. Respite (5)
 4. Weather directions (3)
 5. Pamper, delight (6)
 6. Flea (5)
 7. Deeds (4)
 8. Animal code (3)
 9. Amorous (8)
 10. Exhalation; noxious emanation (6)
 11. Inequalities (4)
 12. On the sheltered side (4)
 13. Mind; slope (4)
 14. Fragrance (4)
 15. Narrow band near end of shield (4)
 16. False god (4)



26. Festivals (5)
27. Compact (5)
28. Fantasy, notion (4)
29. Daydream; secondary planet (4)
30. Mailed (4)
31. South African village (4)
32. Heinous (4)
33. ... Cod (4)
34. Long beaked sea fish (5)
35. Discretion (8)
36. Small tailed amphibian (4)
37. Russian emperor (4)
38. Flag pole (4)
39. Foreigners (6)
40. Portrays in colour (6)
41. Inflate; cure by salt and smoking (5)
42. Over (5)
43. Exhibition of motor cycle and horse feats (5)
44. Makers (5)
45. Correct text (4)
46. Bog (4)
47. Malay boat (4)
48. Once more (4)
49. Poorly (3)
50. Depression in mountain chain (3)

هكذا من الأصل

Camping with camels

A camel race turned into a local festival in El-Arish this year. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** attended the festivities

"Her beauty is like that of a camel." In Sinai, where Bedouin life depends on the camel nothing is as complimentary as a *likening to this animal*.

For three days last week, 40,000 Bedouins and tourists gathered in North Sinai's capital city, El-Arish, to honour these beasts of burden. Riding camels is a Bedouin national sport; the annual races are the equivalent of football league and cup championships.

On the sidelines of the race, festivities, including poetry readings, turned this quiet city into a carnival area. Competitions for the best Bedouin Nabati poem and tent were held as everyone camped on the sand, ate dates, and drank tea. Basketball matches on camel-back also featured this year. During the race, announcer Solaiman El-Ayat, himself formerly a Bedouin camel rider, provided listeners with a running commentary spiced with verses of traditional poetry.

"Before this competition was formally introduced, these races and poetry reading were mainly staged at social events such as marriages," said Youssef Mubarak, manager of the Sinai camel race.

This race and similar ones around the country are increasingly drawing a dedicated audience eager to watch the event and the accompanying carnival. Visitors to El-Arish were treated to a performance of traditional dances inside a large Bedouin-style tent set up especially for the occasion. Local crafts were on display inside the tent as well.

Outside, a blazing fire lit up the night as traditional *kahsa* (rice and meat dish eaten with the hands) was served for dinner.

Participants from North and South Sinai, Ismailia and El-Sharqiya governorates as well as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait camped around the track up to four days before the race even began.

The El-Arish race, first held two years ago, is for thoroughbreds only. Unlike their proletarian counterparts which carry tourists by the pyramids, these camels are the offspring of a breed of "warrior" camels who braved mines and missiles to carry soldiers across the desert during the 1967 and 1973 wars. Much of Bedouin poetry celebrates the noble bloodlines of each tribe's animals.



Stolen heritage

It might have been the strangest funeral in the history of Egypt. In 1875, as a small flotilla carrying 20 mummies from El-Deir El-Bahri in the Valley of the Queens made its way up the Nile to Cairo, local residents abandoned their daily routine and gathered along the river banks to pay homage to the royal cortege. The scene was stunning: women wore black and cries of "Ramses, Ramses" pierced the sky.

These people, explained Hani Zeiny in his book *Secret Egypt: Mysteries from Misr*, instinctively knew that someone important had been displaced from his tomb. But how did they know it was Ramses II and his son Merneptah, Egyptian kings who died more than 2,200 years ago? Earlier the same year, the dead kings' voyage had been decreed by the official antiquities body soon after the mummies were discovered. The ship, which also carried the bodies of Tutmosis III, Seti I and Amen-hotep I, headed to Cairo for study and eventual display. Some of these mummies were later smuggled abroad.

Such smuggling, according to the French Egyptologist Maspero, was not unprecedented. History gives a fair account of Western dealings with Egyptian antiquity since Napoleon Bonaparte's conquest in 1798. The second half of Egypt's 5,000 years of history brought a continuous flow of occupiers including Greeks, Romans, Kurds, Turks, French, and British. By means of destruction, plunder or mere neglect, they all contributed to the loss of much of the treasures amassed by the Pre-Ptolemaic dynasties.

During the 19th century, Europeans unearthed what the sands of time had covered. They deciphered the hieroglyphics and eventually traced the lost history of 30 dynasties. Meanwhile monuments and precious artifacts were taken to Europe and America, sometimes by people who — like Egypt's rulers at that time — could see no wrong in their deed. They believed that only by transfer to a Western museum could these historical pieces be saved. When the century ended, it was among Europeans that the case for preserving Egyptian treasures abroad was most strongly argued.

This heritage-stripping game continues today. At present, over 100,000 Egyptian antiquities are housed in the world's major museums. Until recently, officials kept the issue quiet due to the sensitivities surrounding the retrieval of these objects. But, now the Ministry of Culture has decided enough time has been lost. For the first time in two decades, the ministry has officially requested that the objects be returned.

"We are not asking them to give us back thousands of items, but at least to consider the idea of giving back unique pieces like the Rosetta Stone or Nefertiti's bust. They can keep the rest," Culture Minister Farouk Hosni told the *Weekly*. Hosni has since made several public appeals for progress on the issue.

The culture minister took the initiative shortly after Britain decided to hand Scotland back its 4,000-year-old Destiny Stone. "They have set a precedent. We are asking for 10 pieces out of hundreds — we are not asking much," he explained.

Over 100,000 Egyptian antiquities remain in foreign hands. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** surveys official attempts to regain a bit of the past



London, Berlin (left) and Rome (right) are home to some of Egypt's most precious antiquities which museum officials categorically refuse to return

The objects which Hosni has requested include the 3,350-year-old bust of Nefertiti on display in Berlin's Egyptian Museum, the statue of Queen Hatshepsut at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City and a 4,000-year-old statue of the Egyptian scribe Kay housed at the Louvre. The Rosetta Stone and a black basalt slab discovered by the French — both on display in the British Museum — are also on Hosni's list.

But the heads of department at major museums such as the British Museum and the Metropolitan flatly reject the idea of returning antiquities to their country of origin. A British Ministry of Heritage spokesman recently stated: "There is no correlation whatsoever between the return of Egyptian antiquities in the British Mu-

seum and the Destiny Stone because the latter is part of British heritage and was simply transferred from England to Scotland."

In an interview with the *Weekly*, the head of the Egyptian Department at the British Museum denied that the museum has received an official request for retrieval from Egyptian authorities. "Even if that happened," he said, "it is unthinkable that all the items would be sent back to Egypt. There are about six million visitors annually to the museum. They come to see Egyptian monuments and it would be very disappointing to come and not find them."

This view is shared by Volfgang Kalkah of the German Cultural Heritage Institution. Kalkah dismissed the notion that

Nefertiti's bust would be returned to Egypt: "It will remain in Berlin no matter what because Nefertiti belongs to Berlin."

Ibrahim El-Nawawi, expert at the Ministry of Culture's Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), explained that past attempts to retrieve valuable objects have been fruitless: "The officials responsible for the Egyptian departments in these museums cannot bear the thought of antiquities retrieval. They do not want even to discuss it. They claim that this heritage belongs to the whole world, not only to Egypt, and they expect us to thank them for keeping our heritage in their museums."

Ahmed Kadry, former chairman of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, which has now become the SCA, spearheaded a

campaign to regain Egypt's antiquities. He made a list of all the objects displayed in foreign museums. Letters were sent to 30 international museums urging them to consider sending "some of the unique items back to Egypt". The only response, to Kadry's disappointment, came from two museums which politely rejected the Egyptian request saying that the items belong to the museum and they are very well-preserved and visited by thousands interested in the Ancient Egyptian civilisation.

Efforts by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) to work out some sort of international agreement concerning the issue have been ineffectual. In 1970 a group of countries, including Egypt, sub-

mitted a working formula to the UN body. According to El-Nawawi, UNESCO's final recommendations did not do justice to any of the countries which were stripped of their invaluable heritage.

"All that UNESCO did was to advise imposing tough security measures, documenting antiquities and notifying Interpol in case any thefts took place. It also advised international museums to stop buying stolen items," El-Nawawi explained.

In the years that followed, some of the countries which had stolen objects changed their domestic laws to allow them to keep any monuments as part of their national heritage if they had been in the host country for more than 20 years.

In 1972 a UNESCO international conference produced another attempt to make an agreement. It demanded the retrieval of any objects taken after the signing of this agreement. Objects plundered before the agreement was signed were not included.

A UNESCO conference last June was also disappointing, according to members of the Egyptian delegation. Two articles in the conference agreement stipulated that the countries to which the stolen artifacts belong should compensate the host country in order to retrieve its heritage. But many Egyptian archaeologists protested that Egypt is not rich enough to buy back its own heritage.

Zahi Hawass, head of Giza Antiquities Directorate, stated that Egypt should not count on the UNESCO or any of the UN heritage-keeping bodies. "These items can only be retrieved through diplomatic channels," he said.

Diplomatic sources told the *Weekly* that the Foreign Ministry has been heavily engaged in talks with different countries to implement the 1972 UNESCO agreement. The negotiations, according to one source, are far from reaching concrete results.

"It is premature to come to conclusions now, but this might bear fruit in the near future," the source told the *Weekly*.

Richard Fazzini, chairman of the Egyptian, classical and ancient Middle Eastern art department at the Brooklyn Museum, which houses one of the most valuable Egyptian collections in the world, said, "The issue has to do with ethics and the ethical issue is a sensitive one in a field that is relatively unregulated." Fazzini, who is an Egyptologist, admitted that he himself obtained a 400-item collection of Egyptian-themed knick-knacks ferreted out of antiquities stores and garage sales worldwide.

Philip Saunders, a British expert on locating stolen art, explained that the absence of a photographic or written record of thousands of pieces in storage in Egypt means that customs officers often have no way of knowing if an object has been stolen.

Egyptian antiquities officials have put forth two proposals to the host countries. First, to offer the museums a set of alternative artifacts to replace those in demand. A second proposal is to invite foreign archaeological missions to excavate in Egypt. But officials have yet to receive a response concerning either of these proposals.

• MARSEILLES is home to 2,000 mummified animals and birds, inscribed blocks of granite, bronze, or ivory — all part of the Egyptian collection in the Lavbel Sharitie museum. The collection is the second biggest of Egyptian items in France and contains items dating from the Old Kingdom (2700-2200 BC) to the Coptic period.

• WHEN the Brooklyn Museum decided to set up an ex-

hibition of Pharaonic art in January 1994, no less than 500 items were pulled from storage — most of which were displayed for the first time since their discovery.

• ROME, Istanbul, Paris, Washington, and London all have some of the 51 Egyptian obelisks abroad — only 18 of which are recorded. They were taken from Luxor and Tanis.

• IN 1989, the Egyptian Embassy in Ottawa filed a suit against a Canadian citizen who was arrested in Montreal with 50 pieces of Egyptian antiquities. Egypt requested that the seized items be handed over in accordance with UNESCO conventions for antiquities preservation. The items in question remain stored in a Montreal art gallery.



The Temple of Seti was constructed in an area rich in gold. The guards were happy to have visitors



photos: Michael Stock

A toilsome waterless road

I have often headed east from Maadi to Ain Sokhna on the Gulf of Suez where a hot spring emerges from the South Galala range and flows through a narrow channel toward the sea; more frequently have I turned south at Maadi to travel along the eastern bank of the Nile as far as Koreimat, and then east to Zaafarana with its famous lighthouse; the Qir-Qusair route is well known to me, as is the shorter road joining Qusa to Safage. However, for a reason I cannot explain, I have over explored the southernmost route across the Eastern Desert from Edfu to Marsa Alam. The aim of this journey was to visit a temple I had never seen before, and also see Marsa Alam, which I hear is high on the list for tourism development.

Despite assurances by the Edfu taxi drivers that the road was good, I set off with some trepidation and was surprised to find an excellent tarmac surface extending the entire 230km journey.

The early part of the drive was through somewhat featureless desert and I had time to ponder — as I usually do when travelling through the Eastern Desert — on the different characteristics of the bar-

ren wastelands on either side of the Nile Valley. The immense, unwatered plateau of the Western Desert is a "sea of sand" that covers more than two thirds of the country and descends in a series of slopes to the various oases. It always seems to me to be a friendly desert. Due to a total lack of rainfall, there are no rivers or wadis (shaded out river valleys). Any rainfall that does occur is immediately lost through evaporation and absorption in the stony plains or subterranean depressions. The oases rely on artesian wells for their water supplies, and in places like the Kharga Oases, the ground water rises to the surface.

The much younger (in geological terms) Eastern Desert is also a rocky plateau, but of lower altitude and is somewhat less hospitable. High rugged mountain ranges run parallel to the coast, separated by broad valleys or gorges. Here there are no level surfaces with freshly blown light-colored sand as in the Western Desert, but desiccated wadis and ravines which, when watered by infrequent rains, give rise to

sparse vegetation and drain into the Red Sea. For the first hour my companion and I drove through unwatered tableland. Although I knew that Bir Abed, 20km east of Edfu, was once known for its rock inscriptions carved by ancient quarry workers, I saw no evidence of an ancient settlement. Perhaps they were destroyed when the road was built.

I was on the lookout for a rock temple approximately 50km east of Edfu. It appeared suddenly, just off the road to the south, nestled against a dramatic rock outcropping. The Temple of Seti I is a four-column portico with a rock-hewn inner chamber, its roof supported on four square pillars. The walls are adorned with traditional scenes of the king presenting offerings to the gods. "Not many people come here," said Mohamed, an antiquities guard.

Seti chose to build a monument so far from the Nile Valley in order to lay official claim to the area, rich in gold, and to encourage the ancient miners workers. In an inscription he claimed to have visited

the area personally and lamented the plight of those who had to live in such inhospitable regions.

The hieroglyphic text reads: "How toilsome is the road which has no water! How can men walk on it when their throats are parched? Who shall quench their thirst? Their land is far away; the desert is wide. The man who is thirsty in the ravines complains. What can I do to help? I shall find means of sustaining them, and they will thank God in my name for years to come."

Seti was true to his word. The guards took me to a deep well dug near the temple, which was obviously the focal point of quite a large ancient community, judging from the extent of the ruins. I threw a stone down the well. It was very deep.

The ancient mines, situated further east, were "rediscovered" in 1819 when Mohamed Ali was inspired to re-open them. Large numbers of miners were reportedly sent to Gabel Zabara, about 10km southeast of the temple, but the results were dis-

appointing and the project was abandoned. We continued driving east through picturesque country, which contained mountain ranges and the odd valley with acacia trees. A narrow gorge appeared before the sun down to the Red Sea.

I found Marsa Alam no different from what it was 30 years ago when I first travelled there along the coastal road from Hurgada. It is still a simple fishing village with little else to commend it — on the surface that is. Divers claim that the offshore coral reefs are absolutely spectacular, but all we did was walk down to the beach and wade calf-deep in the translucent water. Curious to know whether any progress had been made along the shore to the south we were tempted, having reached Marsa Alam, to continue driving the 145km journey to Berenice. The coast guard said the road was "not bad" but, to the best of his knowledge, the cape and bay of Berenice — once an important trading post — might be mammoth (off limits). It was not worth the risk. So we turned northward instead and drove along the spectacular coastal road toward Quseir and a night's rest at one of the Red Sea's newest resorts.

Egypt no longer a cheap destination

Increase in admission fees to historic sites may force tourists to become more selective but the extra income is needed **Sherine Nasr** reports

Authorities doubled the admissions fees to museums and historic sites in Egypt last October, in a move which created different reactions from tourists. Brent Goe, a mechanic from New Zealand, said that he would still go to the sites despite the increase. "It is worthwhile. In Egypt, one sees what can never be seen anywhere else in the world."

The impact of the decision, however, is more keenly felt by tourists on tight budgets. Helen Beckett, an English teacher, expressed her surprise that the prices had doubled, not merely been "blown up" a little. "I would have visited most of the sites, but now I will have to choose," she said.

The directors of the different museums felt that the increase would have very little effect on the number of visitors. "It has not caused any drop," said Mohamed Saleh, director of the Egyptian Museum, who claimed that the increase from LE10 to LE20, is still "affordable" for the average tourist.

Saleh noted that the increased price to the hall of the mummies, from LE30 to LE60, upset visitors whose number dropped from 900 to 180 on the first day of the increase. "But this did not last long. Things were back to normal after a couple of days," said Saleh who admitted that it was a "large increase". A plea has, nevertheless, been submitted to the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) to reduce the ticket to LE40. "I am sure that the council will agree," he said.

Directors of the Islamic, Coptic and Graeco-Roman museums all agreed that the increase had not affected the tourist flow.

Significant complaints, however, have been made due to the increased fee to use video cameras at sites, which

in some places mount to LE100. "Most travellers bring along their video cameras to film the places they visit. Unfortunately, I cannot afford to use mine," said Dieter Whistly from Germany.

Farouk Askar, director of the Islamic Museum, felt that accurate evaluation of the increase's impact will only be known after several months, when full reports on admissions are received.

The decision to increase admission fees to museums and museums was scheduled for application in 1993. Tourism conditions, however, were not very encouraging at that time and it was decided to delay its implementation. Travel agents were informed of the change a year in advance in order to adjust their fee schedules.

"There was no problem in readjusting our prices," said Ihab El-Zawy, owner of a travel agency who noted that hotel prices, airfares and Nile cruises all increased by 15 per cent. "I do not object to increases but they must be imposed gradually," he said.

An important observation El-Zawy made was that as a result of the increases, Egypt is no longer one of the cheapest destinations. "We do not want tourists to opt for Turkey, Greece or Syria. These are competitive destinations which provide better services at almost the same prices," he said.

Despite El-Zawy's trepidation, Ihab El-Zayyat, a tourism expert and owner of a travel agency, approves of the increases. "Because our product is unique," he said, "We have no competitors. The admission fees to historical sites will not keep tourists from visiting them."

El-Zayyat felt that before the increase the admission fees to sites were "ridiculously low" which "harmful our

heritage by attracting the wrong class of tourists. We need to encourage cultured visitors who are aware of the need to safeguard monuments, who will not touch the walls or step on inscribed blocks to take photographs." He believes that tourists travelling on limited budgets are more likely to cause damage to the monuments.

The increase in admission prices, he said, is even more advantageous if spent on improving services at the sites, producing adequate security systems and building more provincial museums.

Ahmed Sharaf, assistant director of the tourism sector at the SCA, confirmed that the decision to raise ticket prices was an attempt to increase tourism-generated income. "Since we receive no financial assistance from the state, it was only fair to increase the prices," he explained. The additional money will help bring Egyptian museums into the 21st century and establish more advanced workshops to teach modern restoration techniques.

One plan is to establish special halls to the museums to display objects of particular historical and artistic merit. "The first will be at the Egyptian Museum. A hall will soon be devoted to displaying the statue of Ramesses II and his wife Nefertiti of the Old Kingdom," Sharaf said. Tutankhamun's mask and a number of his artefacts will also be displayed in a separate room with special lighting and an alarm system. "Masterpieces of sculpture, like the statues of Thutmose III and Amenhotep III will also be displayed to better advantage," he said.

Student tourists with proper identification can still enter all museums and historic sites at a 50 per cent discount, and Egyptian students will continue to be admitted free.

Giza plateau	LE20	Temples of Amsa and El-Sebou	LE30
Admission to plateau	LE20	Graeco-Roman monuments	LE12
Khufu's Pyramid	LE20	Kom El-Shouqafa	LE6
Funerary boat	LE20	Graeco-Roman amphitheatre	LE6
		Pompeii's Pillar	LE6
Saqqara	LE20	Islamic and Coptic	LE12
Admission to plateau	LE10	Sultan Hassan Mosque	LE12
New tombs	LE10	Salah El-Din Citadel	LE20
Memphis (Mit Rahina)	LE14	Citadel amphitheatre	LE6
		Mosque of Ibn Kalawoun	LE6
Middle Egypt	LE12	Mosque of Ibn Tulun	LE6
Beni Hassan	LE12	Nilometer	LE6
Tuna El-Gabal	LE12	Fustat	LE6
Tel El-Amarna	LE12	Mosque of Amr Ibn El-Aas	LE6
		El-Sehmet house	LE6
Upper Egypt	LE12	Bah El-Futah and Bah El-Nasr	LE6
Abydos	LE12		
Dendera	LE12	Qaitbay Citadel	LE12
Luxor Temple	LE20	in the morning	LE20
Karnak Temple	LE20	to the evening	LE10
Open air museum, Karnak	LE10	House of Zainab Khatun	LE6
Valley of the Kings	LE20	The Tree of the Virgin, Mataria	LE6
Valley of the Queens	LE12	St George Church in Old Cairo	LE20
Tomb of Nefertari	LE100	and the Synagogue of Ben Ezra	
Tomb of Tutankhamun	LE40		
Nobles tombs at Assasif	LE12	Museums	LE20
Nobles tombs at Gurna	LE12	Egyptian Museum	LE60
Medinet Habu Complex	LE12	Mummies Hall	LE60
The Ramesseum	LE12	Coptic Museum	LE16
Deir El-Bahari	LE12	Islamic Museum	LE16
Edfu	LE20	Luxor Museum	LE16
Kom Ombo	LE10	Aswan Museum (Elephantine)	LE10
Kalabsha	LE12	Museum of Kom Ushim	LE6
Philae	LE20	El-Manial Museum	LE10
Tombs on Kubbet El-Hawa	LE12	Jewellery Museum (Alexandria)	LE20
Unfinished obelisk	LE10	Graeco-Roman Museum	LE16
Rames II Temple, Abu Simbel	LE20	Port Said National Museum	LE12
Temple of Nefertari, Abu Simbel	LE10	Ismailia Museum	LE6

Middle East tourist magnet — How to get there

The Middle East and North Africa, a vast travel area with kaleidoscopic cultures, has many attractions for tourists from all over the world. **Rehab Saad** reports

A two-day seminar entitled, "Marketing opportunities in the Middle East and North Africa," organised by the World Travel Organisation (WTO), took place recently in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. How to increase tourism in the area was one of the main topics discussed.

WTO's October 1995 forecasts said that, by the year 2000, the Middle East will receive 11 million tourists, 4 million from within the region and 7 million from "long-haul" markets.

The forecasts for the year 2010 show that the region will accommodate a tourist volume of 18 million. "This figure may seem modest in view of the growing importance of the Middle East in international tourism, and its position as a focal point to world politics and economy," said Salah Abdel-Wahab, chairman of the Egyptian Tourism Society. "My own forecasts are 28 million tourists visiting almost three per cent of the international tourism market," he said.

Tourism trends in the last five years (1990-1994) show that three countries attract a greater proportion of the total Middle East tourist traffic: Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. He stressed, however, that "there is still a need to develop further the natural and archaeological sites and diversify the product."

Abdel-Wahab described the rich potential of the whole region and said that development should continue, and encompass widespread areas, including the Gulf of Aqaba, the Red Sea, Egypt's northwest coast and northern Sinai, as well as Mithra, Tagh and Salalah in Oman, Aqaba in Jordan, Jumeira Beach in Dubai and Lattakia in Syria.

Robert Cleverdon, a WTO consultant from the University of London, highlighted the importance of peace and stability in the region. "Whenever several months pass without incident, tourism flourishes," he said.

Cleverdon mentioned that tourism in North Africa has also been severely hit by the civil unrest in both Algeria and the Sudan, the continuing international ostracism of Libya and a drop in the number of Europeans visiting Morocco's beach resorts.

Japan, a new and promising market, was represented by tourism experts and officials who highlighted the needs of Japanese travellers. Tetuya Sato announced that Egypt registered the largest annual average of Japanese tourists (58,728) within the region, followed by Morocco (14,932).

Sato emphasised that pleasure is the number one reason Japanese are targeting the region, fol-

lowed closely by business and meetings. "Cultural and historical attractions come before scenic attractions," he said.

The "Opinion Survey of Overseas Travel" conducted by the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation disclosed the top 21 destinations for the Japanese. Egypt, chosen by 2.9 per cent of respondents, ranked 10th. "Egypt is now one of the best recognised destinations among the countries in the Middle East," Sato said.

According to the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation, however, language barriers, security concerns, anxieties about health and high travel costs hinder overseas travel. "There are also specific concerns regarding the Middle East and North Africa. In one way or another, a message must be circulated with the aim of effectively alleviating these concerns," Sato said.

To encourage more Japanese to visit the region, there should be a clear statement of the value of the countries of the region to host more tourists, or east Asians, Sato said, suggesting that a special invitation be issued to visit Middle Eastern countries at a special rate. "Say, US\$500 for 1,000 young Japanese tourists over a period of perhaps five years," he ventured, "jointly sponsored by official tourism offices, air carriers, hotels and other industry-related supporters. The packages should include accommodations, amenities and tours, even to sites not accessible to the general tourist... or offer the best suite in a luxury hotel," he suggested.

Aviation, an important component of tourism and a key to attracting more tourists to the region, was widely discussed. Air transport is a primary means of transport — 360 million tourists were carried on international air services in 1995," said Fahim Rayyan, chairman of the board at EgyptAir.

"To improve our services and attract more passengers, a human resources development program should be available for the air transport industry in the region. The regional airlines should encourage newly-trained staff in different industry fields to reach higher levels of productivity and efficiency. To that end, members of the Arab Air Carriers' Organisation have opened a regional training centre this month to improve the quality of services."

There is no doubt that the Middle East and North Africa are taking a strong position in the international tourist arena, especially with their combined potential for beach tourism development. The region's future definitely looks bright.

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Alexandria, Helwan, Tahrir, Giza, Ramsa Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 777-663.

Cairo-Alexandria

Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Alexandria and the airport. Tickets: LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Alexandria at 7.15am. Tickets from Alexandria: LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh

Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36. Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32. Cairo-Port Said Services every half hour from 6am to 10pm; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Alexandria, then Ramsa Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said

Service 6.45am, from Ramsa Street in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Alexandria. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm; LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada

Service 8pm, from Ramsa Street, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Alexandria. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE30 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai

Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qaitbay (near Ramsa Street). Alexandria and Tahrir Square (near Helwan). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbasiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia

Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qaitbay, then Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets: LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Alexandria at 7.15am. Tickets from Alexandria: LE32 each way.

Cairo-Suez

Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qaitbay, then Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets: LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Alexandria at 7.15am. Tickets from Alexandria: LE32 each way.

Cairo-Asiut

Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qaitbay, then Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets: LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Alexandria at 7.15am. Tickets from Alexandria: LE32 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm. From Abbasiya, then Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets: LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Alexandria at 7.15am. Tickets from Alexandria: LE32 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 8am, from Abbasiya, then Alexandria. Tickets: LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Alexandria at 7.15am. Tickets from Alexandria: LE32 each way.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Alexandria. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage

Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusair

Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor

Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan

Service 3pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said,

Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsa Station. Tel. 147 or 375-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan

"French" deluxe trains with sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE2294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians. "Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE31; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria

"Torbis" trains. VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal. Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains

Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said

Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan

Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada

Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by Rehab Saad

EGYPT AIR

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مكتبة من الأصل

Wrestling triumph for Egypt

Egypt skillfully dominated the 7th Arab Junior Wrestling Championship which concluded last Saturday in Cairo. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

Egypt's junior Greco-Roman and free wrestling team nabbed nearly all the gold medals at the 7th Arab Junior Wrestling Championship, recently concluded at Cairo Stadium's indoor halls. The championship, which was held from 14 to 16 November, witnessed 47 wrestlers and seven teams in competition from Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and host country Egypt.

The Egyptian junior national team's coach Yehia Kazarian, said that the team surpassed all others with their superior skill and technique.

Kazarian together with coaches Hossameddin Mostafa and Shaban Abdel-Wahab, supervised the Egyptian junior team's preparations in a three-month closed camp at the Madi Olympic Centre. "The closed camp was enough to prepare the team for a tough competition," said Kazarian.

The Egyptian team, with 20 wrestlers, pinned down first place in the Greco-Roman and free wrestling events collecting 13 gold medals, and seven silver medals.

In the Greco-Roman event, Egypt came first with a total of 58 points, winning eight gold medals, and two silver. Collecting the eight gold medals were Wissem Hussein weighing 48kg, Ashraf Meligi, 52kg, Saber Mahmoud, 57kg, Karam Gaber 68kg, Abdel-Moneim Kabbari, 74kg, Mohamed Ibrahim, 82kg, Mohamed Maghawri 90kg, Mohamed Ahmed, 100kg, and Mohamed El-Sayed, 130kg.

Egypt was followed by her strongest opponent, Syria, in second place with a total of 50 points with six silver, two bronze and two gold medals won by Zakaria Al-Nashef, 62kg, and Mohamed Al-Kon, 74kg. Al-Kon not only bested Egypt's Abdel-Moneim Kabbari, but he also astounded everyone with his amazing strength and professional attitude.

The Egyptian team met Syria in almost all of the final games, but the Egyptian wrestlers technique proved too much for the Syrians, who relied heavily on brute force and strength.

The Saudi Arabian team was the surprise of the tournament with their newly formed junior team taking third place with 23 points, and three bronze medals. The Saudi team exhibited enough determination and zeal to prove themselves against such traditionally strong teams as Egypt and Syria.

Jordan occupied the fourth position with 18 points and two bronze medals, followed by Morocco in fifth with 16 points, and



Egyptian and Syrian athletes showing off their manoeuvres on the mat at the Arab Junior Wrestling Championship where Egypt swept the competition off their feet photo: Khaled El-Hiqi

two bronze medals. Lebanon and Palestine filled sixth and seventh places with one silver for the former and 16 points for the latter.

The outcome of the free wrestling event mirrored that of the Greco-Roman with the Egyptian team again winning first place with 55 points, five gold medals and five silver. The gold medals

were collected by Ali Abu Taleb, in the 48kg category, Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, 68kg, Ahmed Adel, 82kg, Hisham Abdel-Wahab 100kg, and Walid Hamza, 52kg.

Syria came in second place with 50 points: four gold, two silver, and four bronze, while Saudi Arabia won third place with 21 points and two bronze medals.

Jordan came in fourth with 18 points, and one gold medal, followed by Lebanon in fifth place with 15 points.

Morocco was in sixth place with 12 points, and Palestine rounded up the list with eight points for the seventh place slot. The Palestinian team, in its first appearance after a long absence, received a hearty welcome in a show of Arab solidarity.

A small price to pay

PRIME Minister Kamal El-Ghazouli, head of the Supreme Council of Youth and Sports has agreed to allot LE5 million for the renovation of stadiums and fields for the World Junior Soccer Cup. Egypt will host the tournament scheduled to take place next September in Cairo.

Fishing for pounds

THE SHARM EL-SHEIKH Marine Club will host the 4th Small International Fishing Tournament, organised by the Egyptian Angling Federation and the Sharm El-Sheikh Marine Sports Club, from 25 to 30 November. Maj Gen Hassan Qarawi, head of the organising committee, announced that trolling with rod, reel and line is the only permissible method of capture for tournament catch of sailfin, tuna, jack-travelly, wahoo, barracuda, amberjack, spotted group, dolphin-fish and bonito.

Foreign and Egyptian teams, comprising four members each, will compete within Egyptian Red Sea territorial waters excluding Ras Mohamed National Park and other natural reserves.

Hopes buoyed

DUAL Olympic Games Russian swimming gold medalist Alexander Popov announced his intention to return to competition for the first time since the stabbing three months ago which put his career in doubt. Popov, who won two gold and two silver medals at the Atlanta Olympics, was injured during an altercation with a group of watermelon sellers on a Moscow street.

Popov dismissed speculation that he is considering swimming for Australia at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, but did admit he was still considering applying for Australian citizenship. Under existing legislation, Popov could still represent Russia if he held dual nationality.

Eubank seeks another bout

FORMER world champion Chris Eubank said that he wants to revenge his defeat by Ireland's WBO champion Steve Collins — the only man to beat him as a professional. The extrovert British fighter, who emerged from retirement last month in a bout against Argentina's Luis Barrera in Cairo, lost two WBO super-middleweight title fights to Collins in Ireland last year. Eubank was recently at ringside in Manchester to witness Collins finish Nigel Benn's illustrious career in the fifth defence of his title.

"I want to fight Collins again. I am rested, rejuvenated and back to clean up, and I'm sure I will as long as Collins is not kept away from me," said Eubank.

Bodybuilding tie win

WITH an impressive performance, Egypt was crowned co-winner with Germany at the World Bodybuilding Championship, held last week in Jordan. Initially, despite the Egyptian and German teams having tied with 39 points each, Germany was announced the winner.

The decision was overturned after Adel Fahim, head of the Egyptian delegation, protested to the technical committee arguing that since the teams were equal in points they deserved to share first place. The two countries were followed by Hungary in third place out of 76 countries.

Egypt's Anwar El-Amawy was awarded the gold medal in the bantam weight (65kg), while Mohamed Abdel-Aziz won the bronze medal in the same weight category.

Sole survivor

EGYPT'S Ahmed Barakat, Amir Wagih, Omar El-Brolosy, and Mohamed Mostafa flew to the Pakistani capital, Karachi, last Thursday to compete in the World Squash Individual Championship.

In the first round Wagih managed to beat Daz Khan 3-1, while Brolosy beat Imtiaz Khan 3-1, and Mostafa defeated Lucas Butt 3-1 but the three were unable to advance to the second. Ahmed Barakat as expected eliminated Martin Heath 3-1 and secured a place in the second round.

The championship, featuring a \$130,000 prize pool, hosted 46 squash players in the preliminaries.



Becker failed for Pete's sake

TOO BAD there are no draws in tennis. After four hours and five sets of thrilling tennis, Pete Sampras confirmed his No 1 ranking with a 3-6, 7-6, 7-6, 6-7, 6-4 victory over Boris Becker that gave him the ATP Year World Championship title for the third time. Becker, ranked No 6 in the world, was unable to retain the title although he pounded 32 aces and matched the American shot for shot. Sampras avenged two earlier straight losses to Becker in Germany. In the round-robin match of this \$3.3 million tournament, the money wasn't bad, though. Sampras collected \$1.34 million and Becker settled for \$649,000.

In women's tennis, world number one Steffi Graf completed a sweep of five major title defenses by outlasting cramp-hobbled Martina Hingis 6-3, 4-6, 6-0, 4-6, 6-0 to win her 5th WTA Championship. Graf won \$88,000 dollars, giving her more than 2.6 million dollars in prize money for 1996, a year in which the German star also defended titles at the US and French Opens, Wimbledon and Key Biscayne. Hingis took home \$258,090, making the Swiss student the youngest player in tennis history to earn one million dollars in career earnings. She rose to fourth in the new WTA rankings. (photo: Reuters)

Top of the world judo class

From an inauspicious beginning as a mere upstart to his transformation into a bronze medalist at the Judo World Championship, Sayed Abu Midan has a knack for making martial art enthusiasts take note. **Abeer Anwar** spoke to him about his rise to prominence

Sayed Abu Midan's inauguration into the sport of judo was, to say the least, out of the ordinary. The bronze medalist in the under-78kg category at the 1996 Judo World Championship in Portugal took up the martial art by chance. Midan and his mates were among a raucous group kicking on as judo enthusiasts were practising at their club in Mahala El-Kobra when the club's coach angrily cleared the hall. But, as fate would have it, Midan found he was enthralled by the sport and having snuck back in was spotted once again. The captain, Hussein El-Sherwi, decided to send a squad member to catch him so he could teach him a lesson.

"I will never forget that day," recounted Midan, "instead of carrying me to El-Sherwi for a thrashing, I hauled him over and beat him in front of his captain. The whole hall echoed with laughter at the turn of events."

An immediate rapport and respect developed between Midan and El-Sherwi. The upstart was surprised when El-Sherwi invited him to train with him on a regular basis at the Mahala El-Kobra club.

Midan's family, initially, was against his taking up judo, preferring instead that he take up a high profile sport like football. They nurtured hopes of him becoming the next well-known athlete from El-Mahala after footballer Shawki Ghareeb. But judo was in his blood and



Sayed Abu Midan

Midan, with characteristic determination, stuck to his guns. "Since I was a 10-year-old student at school, I have dreamed of and loved martial arts," said Midan. "One day we had a fight in class and one of my colleagues brought his elder brother to school to beat me up. All my friends begged me to run and hide, but I refused and I was the one to trounce him even though he was 4 years older than me."

Midan's efforts paid off after he took first place in the 1994 nationals in the

under-78kg category. Although he had achieved his dream, at the age of 17, of making the national team, Midan redoubled his training programme to prove himself among the more experienced national team athletes. It all paid off when in his first international competition at the 1995 African Judo Championship in Zimbabwe he pinned down the bronze. Midan managed to better that feat, taking the silver medal, the following year at the African championship in South Africa. The martial artist, despite misgivings on the part of some Egyptian Judo Federation officials, was chosen to accompany former bronze medalist Bassel El-Gharabawi to the world championship.

"Most of the federation's board members disliked the idea of my travelling to the world championship because I lacked experience," explained Midan, "but I was able to win the bronze medal while El-Gharabawi fell back to seventh place. The championship was the turning point of my life as I saw the fruit of my hard efforts and training."

Midan won the first match in the preliminaries of the world championship to enter the quarter-finals but he lost to his French opponent with a difference of 1/8th of a point. He defeated the Brazilian and Polish contenders to place third for the bronze. Since his triumph the federation has sent him to international competitions and closed camps abroad to prepare him to represent Egypt in the Sydney Olympics.

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Yunan Labib Rizk:

An accessible academic: surely a contradiction in terms? Bringing the past out of the classroom is no mean feat

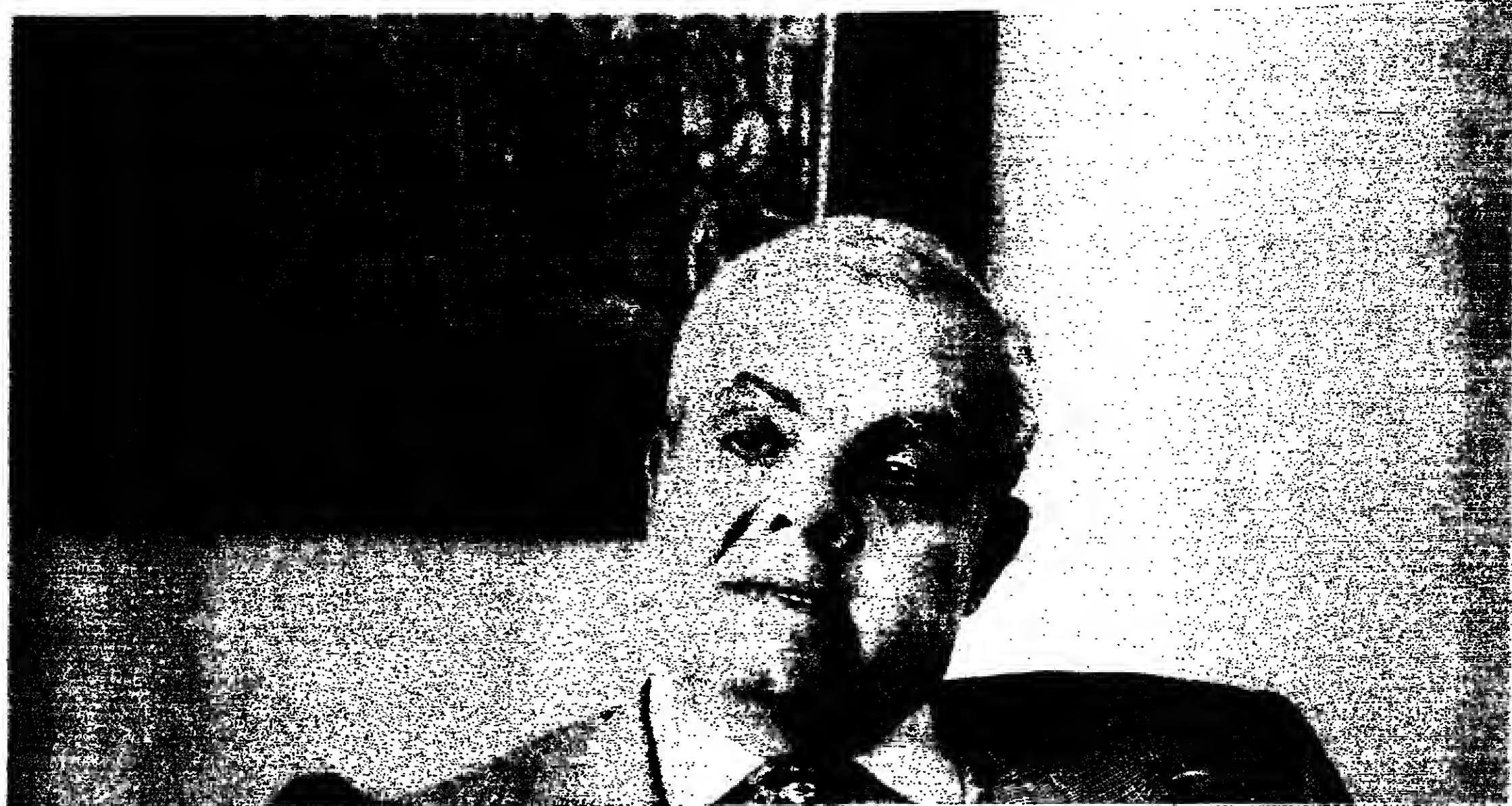


photo: Randa Shaath

The rest is history

How would you describe yourself, Mr Rizk? "A researcher" — a pause — "a simple man". The former label, one assumes, covers his invaluable work on the history of modern Egypt and Sudan, his chronicle of *Al-Ahram* newspaper since its inception, his post of history professor at Ain Shams University, the State Merit Award he received earlier this year... the list could go on. A simple man? He leads an austere, almost a Spartan life.

This is a gentle, approachable man, fond of weeding out cant. Yunan Labib Rizk was born in 1933 at his grandfather's house in Shubra. The house was called Bayt Al-Ma'mur (the commissioner's house) because Rizk Bek Ibrahim, Yunan Labib's grandfather, was the Ezekiya police commissioner. His father died when he was six, after which his mother raised him and his two sisters on the revenue from a plot of agricultural land they had inherited. A title and property — surely that places the family among the landed gentry? "I would say I belong to the petite bourgeoisie," he corrects gently. "Yes, there was a title, but the land, which came from my grandfather, amounted to 50 faddans in all, and when that was divided among the various heirs, there was little left for each. So petit bourgeois is more like it." There were certain advantages to the milieu, especially in a relatively unconventional family like his. His mother was more educated than most women of her time and class; she could read the newspapers and the Bible. His family circumstances, he maintains, allowed him greater freedom of choice.

While Rizk's mother was keen on his receiving a university degree, she had none of the usual preferences for medicine or engineering; the choice was entirely his own. He chose to enrol at the faculty of arts, having always fancied a career in journalism. The history department was chosen more or less by "chance", the eminent historian candidly explains. Awaiting his turn in the registrar's office, as yet uncertain which department

he wanted to enter, Rizk, noticing that the student before him had chosen history, made up his mind in a few minutes. But "I also felt that studying history would equip me for journalism," he quickly adds. Graduating from Ain Shams (formerly Ibrahim Pasha) University, Rizk started teaching at secondary schools in Ismailia then Cairo, while reading for his MA thesis.

He remembers his school-teaching days not as tedious or dull, but with the gratitude one reserves for formative experiences. "Teaching at schools prepared me for many things I was to do later in life." Teaching adolescents is much more demanding than lecturing university undergraduates, he explains: a challenge that forces the teacher to use every trick in the book to keep the pupils interested. How to make history accessible was a lesson he learned in those years, one that later came in handy in university lecture halls, in his writings on history and in his weekly television programme.

The topic of both his MA and PhD theses was the modern history of the Sudan, and Rizk, characteristically, explains the choice in terms of a mixture of chance and personal inclination. "Those were the days of the pan-Arab project, and Professor Ahmed Ezzat Abdel-Karim decided to assign each of the graduate students an Arab country." His own preference for a thesis topic would have been modern Egyptian history, but Rizk felt that the history of Sudan was also a good choice, since it was closely related to that of Egypt. He moved to Sudan to gather data for his PhD thesis, while teaching at Egyptian schools there, and eventually wrote his thesis, titled "Sudan During the First Condominium (1899-1924)". He had planned to stay for four years but returned after two, as his wife and two young daughters could not move with him.

To survive in academia, a sense of irony is an asset. Without it, Rizk could not recount what must have been a traumatic incident with such evident good humour. The day his viva was scheduled, in April 1967, a pro-

fessor on the examining committee did not turn up. Later it turned out he had forgotten all about it. The viva had to be postponed by one week, but "all went well" the second time around, he remembers with a chuckle.

Ever since '67, Rizk has taught history at his alma mater, Ain Shams University, and contributed regularly to specialised journals, magazines and newspapers. Two works he wrote on the Taba question identified him as one of the authorities when the conflict between Israel and Egypt escalated in the eighties. Rizk's work contributed much toward tipping the balance in Egypt's favour.

When the Supreme National Council of Taba was formed in 1985, Rizk was elected a member and charged with compiling the historical memoranda for the hearings which took place in Geneva, in spring of 1988. He continued researching until Egypt won the lawsuit, in September of the same year. Having compiled all the documents available in Egypt, Rizk also obtained texts from England as well as copies of documents kept in Khartoum. "About 80 per cent of the documents of the Egyptian Military Intelligence, which was established by the British in the last century, were deposited in Sudan," he explains. Thanks to his diligence, the Egyptian side had more documents than the Israelis, and were not once caught unawares.

To the general public, Yunan Labib Rizk's name will always be associated with the "Diwan of Contemporary Life", the chronicle of *Al-Ahram's* history. And what better forum for this pioneering work in social history than the very newspaper which provides its subject matter? The *Diwan* is serialised both in the daily paper and in the *Weekly*. Rizk's choice of the word *diwan*, he says, is borrowed from Taha Hussein's famous description of *Al-Ahram*. "Socially," he says, "the *diwan* is a set of sofas where people sit to converse and socialise. And politically, the *diwan* always signified the centre of decision-making and ad-

ministration." In the compilation of his weekly *diwan*, Rizk is assisted by a team of researchers. They study the content of a given year and Rizk chooses the topic of his next installment, bearing in mind its appeal to non-specialised readers. Thus, for example, he devoted an installment of the *diwan* to the first obituary page published in *Al-Ahram*. While the paper initially published the obituaries for free, it soon became a status symbol to pay for publishing a relative's death notice there. "The page became an institution, so that the joke was that 'whoever has not had his obituary published in *Al-Ahram* has not died'."

When first approached to write the chronicle, Rizk wrote a proposal suggesting that he write the history of the newspaper itself. Over time, he says, he expanded the scope of the *diwan* to include the portrayal of Egypt's modern history in *Al-Ahram*. Rizk invariably compares his findings with other primary sources, especially 19th century chroniclers like El-Gabarti. Wistfully, he comments that rapid developments in the media industry have put paid to the chronicler's vocation.

Rizk's home life, which he describes as extremely stable, has surely provided the ideal backdrop for his academic pursuits. His wife is "invariably patient", despite his many interests and professional commitments, which have forced him to neglect home and hearth at times. But he is a proud grandfather. Rizk's two daughters are now mothers: "each has one son and one daughter," he beams, relishing the symmetry.



Yunan Labib Rizk addressing the Shura Council



The indefatigable researcher consults a hefty tome

Profile by Hassan Fouad

Pack of cards

by Madame Sosostriis

♥ Darlings, I don't know how you've managed without me for two long weeks. Believe me, I wouldn't have stayed away for so long, had it not been for considerations deemed more worthy of your attention than my spicy tidbits. Well, many a genius has been recognised only centuries later.

October brought an unprecedented crop of weddings, and let me tell you, I really had to rise to the occasion not once but several times. Gorgeous Ghassan, the daughter of my colleague Mustafa Abdallah, our correspondent in Vienna, and a paediatrician in her own right, married — or should I say was betrothed to, it was just too princely to be true, dear — dentist Wael El-Garhi in the Alf Leila wa Leila ballroom at the Nile Hilton. It was really a night in a thousand (and one). Imagine dears, the famous names that you read about in our more se-

rious pages, all gathered under the lights and the tinsel in honour of Wael and Ghassan. The bride and groom, who were married earlier by the Sheikh El-Azhar were literally borne aloft on a litter into the ballroom, where they mingled with their guests. In the middle of all the commotion, and what with me in my revamped Scheherazade outfit, outdancing Lucy I might add, I just managed to wave at the eminent chairman of *Al-Ahram's* organisation, Ibrahim Nafie, as he was congratulating the happy couple.

As I said before, good things come in droves, and another wedding had me flying to Paris and the

grands couturiers. I came back with a new little number, so me, really, just in time to appear at the wedding of Nassef Sawires and Sherin Maqkar, which was celebrated at the Semiramis Intercontinental. What shall I say? Onsi and Youssef Sawires are such good friends, and so are Samir and Nassef Maqkar. It was just like seeing my very own children all grown up and getting married and I could have done severe damage to my mascara except that I was suddenly distracted by the extreme elegance of *sau ce beau monde*. All the rich and famous of Cairo and beyond, in a real fashion parade dears, from all the fashion capitals of Europe. Absolutely awesome. At one point, I even wondered if I had done justice to myself. My little Jean-Paul Gaultier outfit was looking a little conservative, really. I didn't dare put the question on

the spot to my editor-in-chief, Hoemy Guindy, his adorable wife Moushira, and their lovely daughter Yasmine. All were deep in conversation with our chairman, Ibrahim Nafie and his charming wife Ofa Barakat. Although listening attentively, Nafie was enjoying a little joke on the side with Yasmine. I wondered if the excellence of my literary production was discussed. Would you believe, for once I was not the only centre of attention as everyone gathered around the dance floor to admire the newlyweds as they dipped and swirled.

♦ And now for calmer events. Imagine a photographer clever enough to make glamour his genre! How marvelous. Of course, you well know that I am referring to Van Leo, who has done just that for the past fifty years.

Crowning such an illustrious career, there is a show of his work in the Sony Gallery, at my own alma mater, AUC. To make it even more tempting, the catalogue notes accompanying the show were written by our very own Nigel Ryan.

The first time Van Leo took my picture, I was but a whippersnapper, yet the play of dark on light was the talk of many a salon. By then, of course, he had already immortalised Mariam Fakhraddin, Doris Shafiq and Roushdi Abaza, to mention only my personal favourites. *Quelle joie!* Of course, Van Leo's more experimental portraits of me — notably the series entitled *grit and grease*, if my memory does not betray me — did not appear. I did hear rumours, on the other hand, that Sony Gallery director Abdallah Schleifer will inspire the master's coming works.



photo: Saïah Omar

(L-R) Ghassan and Wael; Nassef and Sherin

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